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AS BALD HEAD OF THE ROCKIES ASKED THIS QUESTION HE JERKED OFF HIS TATTERED SOMBRERO AND BENT FORWARD, SHOWING A BARE AND CIRCULAR WOUND ON THE TOP OF HIS HEAD.

Bald Head of the Rockies;

OR,

The Ang'l of the Range.

A Tale of Sardine-box City, Arizona.

BY MAJOR SAM S. HALL,
("Buckskin Sam,")

AUTHOR OF "OLD ROCKY'S BOYEES," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

GIANT GEORGE "TRAVELS."

"HOOP-LA! Set 'em up! Sling out yer p'ison afore I stampede through yer bull business! I'm tber 'Bald-headed Eagle o' ther Rockies,' an' are a-huntin' sum galoot what's got ther sand ter stomp on my tail-feathers. Shove out a bar'l o' bug-juice afore I bu'st up yer shebang, fer my feed-trough are chuck-full o' cobwebs, an' as dusty as Chalk Canyon. Hoop-la! Don't be bashful, Don Diablo! Don't you go fer ter go back on yer raisin'. Show all ther brass an' grit yer has got in yer karkiss. An' yer needn't try ter shake up vim enuff ter stampede outen this, for yer hain't got ther muscle arter our long trail ter kick over a cotton-tail'd rabbit. Glide this-a-ways, an' we'll pour down a small decoction o' chain-lightnin' what'll make us feel kinder nat'ral-like."

The speaker, as he shouted the first expressions that commence our story, stepped into one of the many hastily-constructed bar-rooms of Sardine-box City, Arizona, holding in his hand a lariat which was drawn taut.

One instant his eyes darted glances around the bar, and then he turned about, continuing as recorded, by addressing himself apparently to some person outside who seemed reluctant to enter.

As may be supposed, those in the bar-room were greatly astonished, not only at the words, but also at the manner and appearance of the stranger, as well as from the fact that he had seemingly gotten his lariat attached to some one who was being dragged about against his will.

All this was soon explained, for as the bar-room loungers gazed open-mouthed, the newcomer gave a powerful pull at the rope, leaning his heavy weight upon it, brought round his hips as it was for the purpose, and the next instant a most comical-looking burro, its huge, snuff-colored ears lying viciously along its neck, shot inside the door. This sudden movement slackened the lariat so quickly that the owner of the animal fell to the floor with a shock that shook the building.

Quickly rising to a sitting posture, the "Bald-headed Eagle of the Rockies," as he had proclaimed himself, gazed into the face of the burro which stood in the middle of the floor looking as innocent as a lamb.

"Waal, dod blast yer pecu'ar pictur', Don Diablo, I wouldn't 'a' thunk yer'd 'a' gone back on me, er knocked ther prop's from under me thet-a-ways. I wouldn't 'a' thul'k yer'd 'a' made a spread eagle o' yer old para', an' I'm

dog-gon'd good mind ter drink alone. I've stood by yer 'mong 'Pache yells, dry cricks, an' close feed, an' now ye're tryin' ter disgrace me! Who's thet laff'd?" he continued, springing to his feet.

Turning about, the speaker raised his bowie and, bringing his hand down suddenly, buried the point of the blade in the pine plank that served as a counter.

Accustomed to rough and desperate characters though the barkeeper undoubtedly was, it was evident that the man before him was a trifle more so than the average patron of the "O. K."

Not only was the space behind the bar very narrow, but the stranger retained a hold on his knife, at the same time leaning over the plank, and gazing into his eyes with a look that meant business; consequently the vender of liquors, without a word, placed a bottle, together with glasses, before his strange customer. And a strange customer he certainly was.

He was tall, broad-shouldered—in fact a giant—with long unkempt hair, stray locks of which hung through holes in the crown of his old greasy sombrero. His face was covered with a heavy beard, with which huge bushy eyebrows claimed a brotherhood, mingling also with the hair above his huge ears.

Large hazel eyes glittered from beneath projecting brows, and proved by the unflinching way in which they met and held the gaze of others, that, notwithstanding his appearance, their owner was an honest, straightforward man.

His ragged buckskins were thrust into cow-hide boots, and a strong wide belt was buckled about his waist; this supporting a pair of old-fashioned army revolvers, and a large bullet-pouch, from which dangled an antelope-horn charger and the scabbard of his bowie.

The O. K. Saloon was but a one-story structure, having some fifteen feet front on the street, and about twice that measurement in depth.

The bar was to the right of the entrance, extending along the side of the room, and beyond this were card-tables.

There were but half-a-dozen men present, mostly strangers, or counted as such by the citizens who were in the habit of congregating at a more popular resort. These were rendered speechless; dazed by the sudden entrance and strange address of the peculiar man with his peculiar beast.

The burro was not much larger than a Newfoundland dog, but a well-packed *kiack* upon its back caused it to appear much bigger, besides adding to its comical appearance.

When this strange individual had filled both the glasses, he wrenched the bowie from the plank, thrust the blade, edge upward, over his ear, the point projecting through a hole in the crown of his sombrero, and the handle hanging downward, apparently ready for use. This done, he grasped one of the tumblers, which in his hand seemed scarcely larger than a thimble, and approached the burro, opening its mouth and inserting the glass between its jaws.

The giant borderman then clutched his own glass from the bar, clicked the same against the tumbler in the burro's mouth, and yelled:

"Hyer's fun, Don Diablo! Th's are our spree, an' we pays for our refreshments. Hoop-la! Down she goes!"

Thus speaking, he gulped the liquor at a single swallow; while the burro slowly raised its head to the perpendicular and allowed the whisky to pour slowly down his throat, to the amazement of the observers, who, however, refrained from expressing it.

"Does yer take me fer a humming-bird, that yer sots out sich a thingamy as thet fer me ter drink outen?" asked the giant, as he returned the glass to the bar. "Jest shove out a quart bottle at me, an' hyer's ther pewter ter pay fer hit!" and he threw a gold eagle upon the counter.

Grasping the bottle, he walked to the side of the burro, and placed it against the animal's shoulder; then taking the nose of the beast in his hand, he bent its head into the former upright position. This done, he sprung backward ten paces, drew his revolver with a lightning-like movement, and fired, without seeming to have taken aim.

The cork flew out from the bottle, showing that the bullet had passed within two inches of the animal's ears; but the burro did not move, until its owner stepped forward and removed the bottle from between its head and shoulder.

"Hoop-la! We're on a jamboree—a reg'lar jim-jamboree, Don Diablo an' ther 'King-pin Kiowa-killer,' ther cutest cuss o' ther canyons—thet's me! Hain't hit, Don?"

"You seem eager to put your oar in," said one of the loungers to another who was flashily dressed, indicating the card sharp. "Why don't you speak, Sport?"

This was spoken in a low tone; and the man addressed straightened up, put on a bold air, and, looking at the giant borderman, asked in a voice of forced insolence, which he showed by his manner that he was not able to maintain:

"Where did you come from? Where were you raised, anyhow?"

The huge stranger looked for an instant with intense contempt upon his questioner, and the next moment raised his revolver.

"Hold up yer keard-slingers, or yer mought pass in yer chips sudden-like!"

The Sport instantly raised his hands above his head, at the same time turning deathly pale.

"I hes a hefty supply o' handles when I'm b'ilin' over with p'ison, an' I duzn't use my plum sober name at all, so yer ain't liable ter know hit jes' now. I cums from fourteen hundred an' forty-four mile t'other side o' nowhere." And, grasping the man who had presumed to question him, by the nape of the neck, he raised him from the floor, and set him astride of the burro; at the same time yelling:

"Keep yer hands up, or I'll make a few side-shafts inter yer karkiss! Hoop-la! Git, Don Diablo! We'll hev some fun outer this here jamboree, or bu'st Sardine-box City!"

As if understanding every word of this, the burro wheeled suddenly, and darted out of the door, almost unseating the Sport, and followed by the giant, while the room rung with uproarious laughter.

CHAPTER II.

A CAROUSE IN THE CANYON.

SARDINE-BOX CITY contained about sixty slab shanties, all of which had been "slapped up" within six months; none being over one story in hight; many being located below in the gulches, and some on the high foot-hills, near the Pinaleno Range. The greater number of these had been erected on each side of the only street in the "City;" and were hotels, so called, groceries and bar-rooms, with all the usual accompaniments connected. A dance-hall had been talked of; but as there were not females enough in the whole burg to form a cotillion, and these being antique dames who had not vim enough to "shake a foot," the project was abandoned for the time being. But the absence of this indispensable sign of an advanced civilization being deemed a serious drawback, a meeting was called, and the citizens "chipped in" quite liberally; the "rocks" being placed in the hands of a down-country wagonmaster, for the purpose of bribing as many Mexican girls as was possible to return with the train, and make Sardine-box City their future home.

From Gold Gulch, thirty miles north, a stage ran twice a week to Navajo, and passing through Sardine-box. The wagon-train followed the same trail, but was frequently a full fortnight on the road.

There was no soil suitable for tillage in the vicinity; and no sane man would have located here had not "pay dirt" been struck in the bottom of the canyons; where at times the water from the mountains rushed down, and rich quartz leads had been discovered.

The rush, so far, had not developed the mines; for it would take months to get quartz mills into operation, the heavy machinery having to be transported many hundreds of miles in the most primitive manner.

But the "City" was, all things considered, in a prosperous condition. It had been at one time at the mercy of Victoria's celebrated band of border butchers; in fact his warriors had charged through the town, and driven away the horses and cattle of the residents, who only escaped death by fortifying themselves among the boulders. This, however, was some time previous to the commencement of our tale.

The reports that rich deposits had been discovered in the vicinity, having spread up and down the country, there had been a second rush which had resulted in building up the town to the respectable size that we now find it.

The usual number of desperate characters that are always to be found in a new mining-town were in Sardine-box City; and, only a week previous to the opening of our story, a band of road-agents had "gone through" the Gold Gulch stage. This was the third time that the mails and passengers had been robbed.

The great event in the history of the town, however, had only just occurred. The entire posse of citizens—from Tom Jones, who had been elected sheriff by acclamation, to the beathen Chineese washerman—had turned out, nearly insane with wonder and delight, at the arrival of a young and lovely lady, whose exclusiveness, as time advanced, caused the excitement to increase.

Her beauty was vouched for by Hank Holbrook, proprietor of Nugget Hotel, the only public house that boasted a suit of rooms over the bar, and a glass window overlooking the street.

Hank had assisted the young lady from the stage, and, although she was closely veiled, he had caught a glimpse of her face in the dining-room.

"I'll jist be dog-gon'd, boys," he said enthusiastically, his face glowing with excitement, and his nose several shades redder than ordinary; "she's a roarer! She's a rip-staver! An' I'll swar ter hit, she's ther purtiest piece o' caliker south o' ther Unyin Paciff. Let's liquor all 'round et my expense. I be durned ef I don't keep her ef I hes ter board her free gratis!"

The boys all drank at Hank's expense, for the first time since he had his "opening," and a number of "rounds" followed in quick succession, the crowd growing more and more excited, until Hank jumped upon the bar and called for silence.

There were no fewer than fifty men, of many nationalities, most of them in the roughest garbs, and all with their eyes turned upon their host.

With a proud air and self-important smile, Hank removed his hat, throwing it down upon the counter and stamping upon it with vigor. He was a short, fleshy, bald-headed personage, and, in his present attitude, presented a very comical appearance. He had never before been known to be as happy or as full of his own merchandise as upon this occasion.

"Fell'r-citz," at length commenced Hank, in a hoarse whisper; "fell'r-citz, I've bin thar! I feels fer yer. Fact are, I'm thar now. I'm nigh on ter 'splodin'. I'm dead sure on't. Ef I duzn't git up an' git, I'm goin' ter make a heavy sacrifice fer ther good o' ther burg. I knows yer'd flip yer twenties 'cross my bar from now on ter midnight, but I'm satisfied we can't stand hit. Ef we raises a cirkuss, the caliker up 'bove 'll jest like es not flutter, flicker, light out, skip, skute, an' ther town 'll be ruinated. Fel'l'r-citz, I motions thet we glides outen this, take a few bottles, an' hev ther thing out 'mong ther bowlders, whar we kin howl 'thout bu'stin' up ther hull prospecks o' futur' civilization by stompedin' ther 'Ang'l o' ther Penarlayno Range' clean down ter Twoson! Show paws! Hit's a vote. We'll git!"

And "git" they did. The whole crowd, with a generous supply of their favorite beverage, stepped lightly out, with Hank at their head; and then, first on a dog-trot, and next with a wild run, struck for the bottom of the deepest canyon.

Every bar-room, shanty and mine was deserted in less than an hour after the "Angel o' Penarlayno Range" arrived; and all were congregated in the canyon, drinking, dancing, and filling the air with yells that would have made Victoria's band of Apache braves "git up and dust" with superstitious horror.

"Feller-citz!" yelled Hank, climbing upon a bowlder, after having taken in a few more drinks.

"Order! Order! Oh, yes! Feller-citz!" These cries rung out on all sides.

"Feller-citz!" continued Hank, "we're all a set o' confounded, dod-blasted fools; for we hes got down inter this canyon, an' we'z too full o' bug-juice ter git back! Why didn't some o' yer hev ther brains ter say sumthin' about blankets an' grub? We hes got ter stay hyer ontill mornin'. I wouldn't 'pear afore ther Ang'l o' Penarlayno Range, 'thout I war got up in fu'st-class style, an' could spit out purty fine 'Nited States, fer she's a reg'lar out an' outer, with a Sarah Togeys trunk. Who's ther soberest pilgrim in this hyer crowd? Kin I whoop up a man that'll clime thet trail, an' fotch a demi-john o' lightnin' without bu'stin' it?"

"Hyers yer man!" yelled out Tom Jones, the sheriff, as a "cowboy" advanced to the base of the bowlder.

Hank eyed the youth critically.

"Tom Jones, does yer think he kin make ther riddle?"

"I'll bet a gotch-eared mule he kin climb a streak o' lubricated chain-lightnin'," was the reply.

"What's yer handle, my border baby?" asked Hank.

"Ther 'Terrific Tarranteler o' ther Tropicks. are what I'm gin'r'ly called," answered the cowboy, with a laugh, and a wink at his pards.

"Ef yer legs are es loose es yer tongue, I'll risk yer. Yer kin glide up easy enough, I reckon; but hit's the bug-juice what interests me 'bout now. Yer kin break yer neck goin' up, but hit's comin' down. See?"

"Never you mind, Hank. I'll roll the jug, if I see I'm going to break my neck."

"Waal, I reckon you'd better try it on. Hyers a key. Tell my ole woman ter give yer the Johndemi, an' keep ther key until I shows up. Jest 'splain ter her thet we hes gone ontar ther war-path arter Vic's 'Paches, an' she must take ther best o' keer o' ther Ang'l o' Penarlayno Range!"

Hank, after handing over the key of the liquor-room to the cowboy, who seemed far above the crowd in education, flopped over upon the rock, and lay gazing in wonder and admiration, as he saw what he thought to be two "Terrifs" ascending the steep and dangerous side of the canyon.

"I wouldn't 'a' thunk thar war so many of us, ef I didn't see'd him myself;" whispered Hank, in soliloquy. "Sardine-box'll make hit's name good by bein' packed full inside o' three moons. Don't break ther jug, Terrif. 'Rah for ther Ang'l o' Penarlayno Range! Whoop 'er up wi' thet whisk'! 'Bah—rah—range—ther Ang'l—'rah!" And the landlord turned upon his side and fell into a drunken slumber.

"Terrif" returned with the jug; but Hank did not have the pleasure of sampling the whisky, as he could not be awakened.

Never before since its settlement had Sardine-box City been so quiet; and never before since the earth first turned upon its axis, had the canyon echoed to such bacchanalian yells, howls, and laughter, as upon the first night after the arrival of the young lady from the States.

CHAPTER III.

THE HEROINE.

THE beautiful young lady who had uncon-

sciously caused so much excitement, after making arrangements with the landlord of Nugget Hotel for the suit of rooms, immediately ascended the rough staircase, piloted by Hank's fat wife, whose plain, but motherly and good-natured face, impressed her rather favorably; the more so from the fact that the accommodations of the house were primitive in the extreme. The rooms were simply the attic of the shanty, divided by a screen of cotton cloth. The furniture was of the very plainest description; and it was impossible for the occupant to walk upright, except by keeping in a line with the ridge-pole.

"Them rooms," said the landlady with pride, "air ther bestest rigged out lay-outs in Sardine-box City; but I knows they hain't fit for a lady like you is. Howsomever, if yer comes this-a-ways, yer must put up with a heap of discomforts. We've tried, an' tried ter git Hank Holbrook ter levant back Texas-way, but he's jest es stubborn es a gov'ment mule!"

"The rooms will do very well, Mrs. Holbrook; I came here expecting to encounter many hardships, but I have a purpose in view. I shall explain my position and plans to you when I have recovered from the fatigues of my journey, for I feel that I can trust you."

"Deed yer kin, dearie. Ef I kin be of any use ter yer, I will, an' all ther men-folks in Sardine-box City 'll stand ready ter fight fer yer at a minit's notice. Ther hain't a good-lookin' woman or a young woman in ther hull town, an' ther boy's 'll go crazy over yer. My man's a-makin' a fool of hisself now, I'll bet."

The old lady bustled down-stairs, leaving her guest to disrobe, and found a dozen miners in a war of words in regard to the one who was to carry up the trunk of the new arrival.

"I'll jest settle this thing right off, boys!" cried out the landlady. "You-uns what's in ther game chip in an X apiece an' draw straws, ther 'rocks' ter go fer ther poor pilgrim who gits a squint at the lady. Ther man thet totes that trunk up won't be wo'th shucks fer ther nex' three months, an' he'll want somethin' in they way of 'dust' fer his keep. Hurry up, 'fore Hank comes outen the bar, er he'll try ter shoulder ther trunk an' break his dog-goned neck a-fallin' down-sta'rs."

The gentle hostess collected the "eagles," and held the straws; then the miner who drew the longest, shouldered the "Sarah-Togey" and mounted the stairs.

"Didn't git a durned squint!" he said in his disappointment, as he returned; "dog-goned ef I did! Boys, hyer's yer pewter; I don't need hit. You bet I'm jest goin' ter be es cross es a settin'-hen arter three weeks' squattin' on chalk aigs!"

The "boys" left by the rear door and entered the bar, none of them mentioning the little game they had unsuccessfully played to get a sight of the new arrival; afterward they repaired with the crowd to the canyon.

No sooner had Mrs. Holbrook descended the stairs than the young lady entered the front room, and, placing a small hand-sachel upon the bed, threw aside her bonnet and traveling-duster, and proceeded to remove the traces of her journey from her face and hands.

This done, she brushed her dark, wavy hair, and viewed herself in the small mirror.

Hank Holbrook had not been mistaken in reporting that his unexpected and exceedingly welcome guest was lovely as an angel, although he had caught but a glimpse of her features. She was indeed beautiful.

Of slight form and medium hight, graceful and well-developed, taking into consideration her youth and stature; with dark, piercing eyes and long lashes, and an expression of firmness about the perfect chin and mouth, which spoke of a courage beyond the majority of her sex.

She was dressed plainly but neatly, and moved with a nervous restlessness while she arranged her toilet. This done, she opened the sachel, and from it drew out several letters and papers. One of the former she caught up and pressed to her lips. It was directed:

"MISS LENA LAWRENCE,
"ST. LOUIS, MO."

and post-marked,

"GOLD GULCH, ARIZONA."

"Lena Lawrence will be known or seen no more in St. Louis," she spoke in soliloquy, "until she has avenged the traducer of her name, the swindler of her father, and the murderer of her brother! Yes; he who has committed these crimes must die! I have sworn it, and my life shall be devoted to the fulfillment of my oath. No one here must know my real name. Henceforth I must be known as Dora Deane."

"Oh, if I could but ascertain the whereabouts of Rudolph Reynolds, and convince him of my loyal and undying love—convince him of the perfidy of Edward Willoughby, the man he once called *friend*, as did also my poor murdered brother, who fell by this miscreant's hand! Rudolph would follow on the trail of vengeance by my side. I love him more and more each day that I live; and yet I do not know if he be living or dead. Oh, Heaven! what misery and bitter grief the Fates have hurled into my path for twelve long months! But I must bear up. I must not think of Rudolph, but of revenge. The gold which cost my brother his life—the gold he toiled for, to replace our father's lost fortune—this must be found, to enable me to track the murderer. It is a fitting way to spend it. The future is pregnant with danger and death; this I realize. I have at last arrived near the spot where my brother was murdered; and here I must prepare a paper which, in the event of my death, will explain who I am, and my object in coming here."

She took up a pen and began to write.

"To the good people of Sardine-box City:—

"MY DEAR FRIENDS:—I address you thus, feeling in my heart that, should these lines ever be perused, you will, knowing me and my object, be charitable to my memory, and forgive me for coming into your midst, and then disappearing so mysteriously.

"I belong to a wealthy and highly respectable family of St. Louis. My father resides, at this writing, in that city, although he is an aged man, and in failing health. I have left him in the care of a younger sister, and with means sufficient for his every want for the residue of his days. My object in coming among you I will explain.

"Our family consisted of a sister, Laura, a brother, Samuel, and my father, Horatio Lawrence,

besides myself. I say, *consisted*; for my brother's bones lie within five miles of your town. He was one of the earliest discoverers of gold in this section of the Territory. My mother died while I was quite young. My brother, when at home, had two associates, all three young men being of nearly the same age. The names of his friends were Rudolph Reynolds and Edward Willoughby. The first-mentioned was a handsome, noble young man, between whom and myself sprung up a warm friendship, which at length ripened into love. The latter was also handsome, but addicted to drink, and a confirmed gambler, without honor or principle; but my brother remained strangely blind to his vices.

"Rudolph Reynolds and myself were not only plighted lovers, but the day had been fixed upon for our marriage. Edward Willoughby had, for some time, persecuted me by his attentions; and, at the same time, excited somewhat the jealousy of Rudolph.

"The time came when my lover was obliged to visit New York, in the interest of the firm of which his father was a member. From the date of his departure, Edward Willoughby haunted our home; and, I have every reason to believe, intercepted the letters which Rudolph had written me. At last one letter came. In this my lover stated that, having received a letter from me, in which I spoke of my regret at ever having promised to become his wife, and also that I was soon to be married to Edward Willoughby, he had lost all confidence in human nature, and was then setting out for the wild West.

"Previous to the receipt of this, to me, inexplicable letter, Edward Willoughby had induced my father to invest almost his entire fortune in mining stocks. This was after he had insulted me by a proposal of marriage, but of which I had never spoken. The stock in which my father had invested was worthless; this, however, he did not know, until Edward, with his glowing accounts of the Eldorado he had discovered, had prevailed upon my brother to draw the sum of ten thousand dollars, which had been left him by my mother, from the bank, and start with him for the West.

"When I scorned Willoughby's offer of marriage, he swore that he would yet bring me to grief and poverty, and I laughed at his threats; but when my father's fortune had vanished through his means, and my brother had gone from home in his company, then I realized something of his devilish character, and recalled his terrible oath.

"Time passed; I heard nothing from Rudolph; but word came from my brother, that Willoughby, after robbing him of all that he possessed, had wounded him, and left him to die in a strange land. The wretch, after having been made the chief of a gang of bandits, had come to my brother's camp, and robbed, and then murdered him!

"The thought of all the fearful wrongs done to me and mine by this fiend, changed me suddenly into a determined revengeful woman. I took an oath to hunt this inhuman monster, the assassin of my brother, the traducer of my name, and the swindler of my father. I swore that, weak, defenseless girl though I was, I would hunt him to his death; and I will keep my oath, even if it takes my whole lifetime to accomplish it.

"In disguise I shall disappear from your town; but will return if life be spared me. My brother's bones lie buried at the head of Dead Man's Gulch. A chart, forwarded to me by a friend of his, will guide me to his last resting-place, and also to the place where the gold, which Edward Willoughby failed to discover, is hidden. The villain is now known as 'El Capitan the Chief of the Panthers.'

"In the event of my death, or even if I do not return within thirty days, mail my papers to

"HORATIO LAWRENCE,

"1344 Le Roy St.,

"St. Louis, Mo.

"LENA LAWRENCE."

This paper, Dora Deane, for so we must now speak of her, sealed and addressed:

"To the citizens of Sardine-box City:—

"To be opened by Mr. Hank Holbrook, at the expiration of thirty days, and read in public."

This being completed, the young girl opened the letter, of which former mention has been made, and read as follows:

"DEAD MAN'S GULCH, }
"August 13, 187—. }

"MY DARLING SISTER LENA:—

"I have received your letter in which you speak of the perfidy of Edward Willoughby. I accused him of everything. We quarreled. He attempted my life, and then fled, having first robbed me. On my recovery I came to Arizona, where, at this point, I struck rich deposits of pocket-gold, and secreted in the mountain near this, a large fortune; but I did not encamp on the spot. Two days ago, a band of roal-agents, known as the "Panthers," discovered my camp and shot me, leaving me, as they supposed, dead. They searched for my gold, but without success, and then left. The chief of the outlaws, who himself shot me, with a demon smile and words of recognition upon his lips, was none other than the curse of our family, *Edward Willoughby*.

"I have been nursed, with all the care and tenderness of a woman, by a scout known as "Giant George," with whom I had traveled many trails, who providentially discovered me. We both know, however, that I must soon die. He is true as steel, though the most eccentric of men; and he swears that he will avenge my murder.

"He will post this letter, in which I will inclose a chart by which you can find my gold. It will place our father in a better condition, financially than he ever was. I hope that you and Rudolph are now man and wife, and that you will come here together. Find Giant George, and trust him as you would myself. I cannot write more, for I am very weak, and the shadows of death are upon me. I have made my peace, I trust, with my Maker.

"Break this as considerably as you can to my father, and to my pet, Laura. Tell them my last thoughts were of them and of our home. I shall die praying that God will ever watch over, and bless you all.

"The sun is shining bright, but the world is growing dark to me. I can see the tears of sorrow, as they roll down the beard of Giant George, who bends over me.

"To the last, your loving brother,

"SAMUEL H. LAWRENCE."

A hundred times, at the least, had Dora read and wept over this letter; and now her form was convulsed with grief, and the tears flowed freely.

Slowly she bent forward upon the table, her head resting upon her arms, and the weary, travel-worn maiden sobbed herself to sleep.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CITIZENS RECUPERATE.

We have seen how nearly the entire population of Sardine-box celebrated the arrival of the "Sarah-Togey" and its angelic owner.

When the morning sun cast its bright rays across the top of the chasin, one by one, the revelers of the previous night awoke.

The first to awaken looked about anxiously for Hank Holbrook, with the intention of "striking" the landlord for the drinks.

Hank was perfectly wild, and as mad as a hatter; not knowing how he came to be in such

a fix. At length one of the miners rushed up to him and yelled:

"'Rah for ther Ang'l o' Penarlayno Range!"

These words brought him to his feet in an instant, his features glowing with the old pride.

"Feller citz!" he yelled, "let's git! Help me ter climb this cussed canyon, will some o' yer? I'm es slimpsy es an old dish-rag, an' es shaky es Jim Dryden war when we strung him up on a black-jack in Texas, for confistercatin' mules! Did yer ever hear me tell about Jim?"

"Dod blast Jim Dryden!" called out the sheriff, impatiently. "Come on, Hank! We're es dry es ole pank an' we'll be done for ef we lingers hyer long. I'm dog-goned ef I don't believe I'll hev brain fever."

With much difficulty, stumbling, tumbling, yelling and laughing, Hank was at last landed on the level of the canyon.

"Hit 'u'd make an alligator laugh, Hank, ter see sich a cirkuss," asserted the sheriff.

"Bless my soul, boys, I'm 'bleeged ter yer; I declar' I war never so sot back, an' I'm dang'd ef yer'll ever git me down thar ag'in. How does I 'pear this mornin'?"

"Yer jest look hunk," said Tom.

It was a hard-looking crowd that filed into the bar-room of the Nugget Hotel that morning.

"I reckon," said the sheriff, thet we'd orter 'p'int a committy ter ax her ef we can't do somethin' for her. Mebbe so she's in trouble, an' us citz kin smooth her trail. I motions, fu'st off, thet we-'uns 'dopts her. Let's chip in, ef she hain't got no extry dust, an' keep her fer a ornament. Yer say thet nobody hes sich a Sarah-Togey trunk. Do yer reckon she comes from that burg? Does she sing United States? Whar in thunder is Sarah Togey, Hank?"

"Dog-goned ef I knows, Tom. I've heer'd on hit in Texas. Hit's a slam-up place, I'm a-gamblin' on that, or hit wouldn't perjuice seech female weemin es she bees. Ya-as, she slings 'Nited States. Hit's her nat'ral lingo. Mebbe she can't sing; but I'll bet my int'rest in Arizony she kin make a mockin'-bird skute for a holler tree an' hide hisselt outen pure shame an' jealousy."

"We're all goin' our pile on her, Hank, jest on your say-so. We doesn't know whether she's a reg'lar fu'st-class XXX gal, es purty es a kromo, but yer hes slung out thet verdick; an' ef yer hes made a pack of fools of us, why, we'll jest cross thet street in the futur' when we's dry."

"I ain't 'tall afear'd o' losin' custom, Tom," said Hank, "on no p'int like that, you bet."

At this moment loud yells resounded through the street, and the "citz" who had congregated at the bar of the Nugget Hotel gazed at each other a moment in indignant amazement.

"What dod-blasted fool is kickin' up sich a rumpus now?" exclaimed mine host.

"Hoop-la! Skip lively, Don Diablo, an' give thet keard-slinger a fu'st-class ride. Whoop-er-up! E-e-e-ho! Hail K'lumby! We-'uns is on a jim-jamboree, Don Diablo. We'll shake thet Sardines outen thet ole box an' run thet town for a few fleetin' periods. Hoop-la! Hyer we come on a cyclone stampede!"

Thus yelled the giant scout as he left the O. K.

saloon and followed his galloping burro down the street, holding a six-shooter in each hand, while "Sport," his hands held high in air with fear, rage and shame, was forced to curl his legs under the animal to keep from falling ignominiously to the earth.

"Didn't I tell yer, Don Diablo?" called out the scout; "we-'uns hes shook thet Sardines all out in a bunch. Say, pilgrims, thet cirkuss hes crost thet Penarlayno Range. Who keers ter ride thet boss burro o' Arizony?"

As the motley crowd bounded from the bar, and rushed into the street, the burro came galloping at full speed, and as he came opposite the hotel and its crowd of loungers, its owner, walking some ten feet in the rear, gave a piercing whistle.

Not a limb, or a muscle of Don Diablo moved after the signal cut the air, the animal came to an abrupt halt that hurled its rider forward over the burro's head, sprawling into the middle of the street.

The crowd of "citz," at first highly indignant at the uproar, now burst into loud laughter, and being somewhat under the influence of liquor, joined hilariously in the racket; for Sport was a new-comer, and not a favorite in the town.

The appearance of the self-styled "Bald Head of the Rockies," was such, that none cared to question his business in Sardine-box City. Tom Jones, being the leading official of the town, felt it incumbent on himself to address the man; indeed he was forced into so doing by the frequent and urgent glances of his townsmen, who intimidated by their manner that they would stand by him.

Consequently, as the huge human approached, with a peculiar mingling of disdain, reckless daring, and mirth upon his features, Tom spoke:

"Waal, what's thet difficult 'tween yer an' Sport? When did yer 'rove in our burg?"

"Who tole yer ter open yer corn-cake hopper? Who does yer take yerself ter be?"

"I'm the sheriff o' this city," asserted Tom with pride; "an' I hes a right ter ax questions."

"Yer thet sheriff, are yer? Whar's thet alcalde?"

"We-'uns hesn't no mayor," was the reply. "I holds thet highest office in this hyer burg."

"Yer mean thet yer did until I 'rove," corrected the giant. "I'm a-bossin' Sardines about hyer myself. Me an' Don Diablo is on a jim-jamboree, an' we doesn't take water, or crawfish outen ary crowd yer kin scar up in Arizony. Hoop-la! Scrouge him 'cross thet street!" And the burro forced the luckless "Sport" before it, as directed, still holding the slack of the enraged man's breeches between his teeth.

The ludicrous side of the scene, however, was no longer appreciated by the crowd. Tom Jones trembled with pent-up fury, as his hand nervously moved toward the butt of his revolver.

"Now look a-here, Mister Sheriff, thet'll do. I've fooled with you-'uns 'bout long enough. Some o' yer mought be danged soft-headed, an' try ter bore a Cumstock tunnel through my in'ards, an' git his own carkiss turned inter a cream-skimmer. Hold up yer hands, every

one o' yer, danged speedy," he added, yelling in a key that showed he meant business, and every man among the "citz" obeyed.

"Does I 'pear like a 'fresh?' Does I look like a tender-hoof? Does yer think I'm a infant what'll skute, slide, levant from ary crowd this side o' ther Unyin Percif? I come inter this burg for fun; an' I'm a-goin' ter linger till Don Diablo shakes a few ticks offen his hide."

The "citz" of Sardine-box, almost insane with rage, were forced to walk single-file, until a line was formed from the "Nugget" to the opposite bar. In front of this line, Don Diablo shoved the man who was called "Sport" back and forth.

The "Bald Head o' the Rockies" had kept his word; and Sardine-box City was under his thumb, but there was nothing now of exultation in the manner of the giant scout, who stood regarding them with a peculiar mysterious look upon his face, which still further puzzled them.

Every man in the line looked toward the singular character who had so suddenly appeared in their midst, and so unexpectedly got the "drop" on them; but not one seemed to have formed any plan to extricate himself or his friends from the humiliating position.

While matters were in this position, Hank Holbrook peeped out from his bar door; the muzzle of a double-barreled shot-gun also projecting showing plainly his object.

Over his door was a sign, four feet in length, and painted white; upon which, in black letters, was the name of his hotel.

The scout did not stand more than fifteen paces from the entrance to Nugget Hotel; and, as Hank gazed out, he observed him, but did not by any sign, betray the fact.

Slowly the form of the landlord came into view; slowly the gun was brought to his shoulder, and the barrel raised upward, pointing to the huge borderman, who, with lightning-like motion wheeled toward the point of attack, and fired four shots in quick succession. The next moment, his eyes ranged along the line of "citz" his remaining weapon being firm grasped and pointed.

As Hank Holbrook strove to catch sights, his form trembling with excitement, he saw the quick flashes of the giant's revolver; and, rendered desperate by his peril, he straightened up his form boldly; but as his finger pressed the trigger, down came the sign of the Nugget Hotel, striking the affrighted landlord on the head, who fell forward, his gun exploding, and the charge scattering the gravel in front of his door.

The eyes of the "citz" gazed in wonder and amazement, for they knew that the giant scout had driven a nail at every shot.

CHAPTER V.

DEADLY PERIL OF THE GIANT.

THE "citz" of Sardine Box had been in a demoralized condition for twenty-four hours; but there was a new and startling surprise for them at hand. No sooner had the burly borderer showed his marvelous skill with his revolver, than he coolly ordered:

"Sardines! Break ranks!"

"Now," added he, as the "citz" lowered their hands, "ef thar's a pilgrim among yer what feels that his keeracter hes bin lasserated, let him glide out, an' I'll give him two p'int in ary game he keers ter play—cut, gouge, er shute! You-uns what thinks I hes bin slingin' too much loose gab, an' playin' a bluff game es it war, kin satisfy theirselves, one er two at a time. Ef I got ther dead wood on yer, it warn't my gravy what war spilt, but your own fryin'-pan what got kicked inter ther fire."

This cool, calm mode of address, and the off-hand way in which he offered to fight the crowd impressed them even more strongly than his daring and reckless manner.

Hank Holbrook crawled into his bar without a word, and the crowd collected, apparently without any object, in front of the hotel, where they were joined by "Sport," much the worse for wear.

The giant seated himself on the ground in the middle of the street, his revolver in hand, and his gaze fixed upon the crowd, who were being addressed by the half-frenzied Sport, whose indignation at the treatment he had received knew no bounds.

At this moment the clatter of hoofs sounded upon their ears; and a man, mounted on a powerful black horse which showed points of great speed, came galloping down the street toward the Nugget Hotel.

The eyes of the rider flashed from one to another of the "citz," as if searching for a familiar face.

Suddenly, the giant scout, who seemed to have escaped the stranger's notice, bounded forward, with a wild and vengeful whoop.

"Black Ben! I've got yer now!" he yelled, as he grasped the bridle-rein of the horse.

One instant, eye met eye; the face of the stranger turning ghastly pale. The next, the huge borderman jerked him from the horse; at the same time drawing his bowie-knife.

"Draw, Black Ben! Hit's bowie ag'in' bowie!"

Before the words had left his lips, the last comer had drawn his knife. Back and forth in the street, did the two men drive each other, while the "citz," now doubly amazed at the terrible sight, stood open-mouthed and appalled, their hands on their weapons.

"I'm jest a-playin' with yer, Ben!" shouted the giant; and his opponent seemed to realize that this was true. One desperate lunge he made at the breast of the scout; but quick as thought, his arm was struck and he was hurled half about; and before he could recover he received a fatal blow from the giant.

Then, as from one man, came the vengeful cries of the "citz:"

"Hang him! Jump him, boys!"

In less time than is required to narrate, the giant was disarmed and hurried down the street toward the canyon.

In less than half the distance this strange being came to a sudden halt, and, giving a peculiar whistle, yelled:

"Come on, Don Diablo! Ther circus ain't over, Sardines. Ef yer string me up for seed, yer got ter hang Don!"

Nothing could have caused the mob to become less violent than these words and the ut-

ter unconcern of the man whom they had resolved to hang. But they pressed him onward in spite of it, Hank Holbrook following in the rear, panting with excitement and exertion, as he staggered under the weight of a large jug of whisky, with which he proposed to keep up the fever heat of the "citz." To the right of the street, and among the scattering bowlders, stood a large mesquite tree, which, on more than one occasion, had been used for the same purpose; and to it the mob rushed, having first bound the hands of the giant with a lariat.

As the crowd neared the tree, their shouts and yells subsided, and all gazed at Tom Jones, expecting him to act as the leader, by virtue of his exalted civic office.

At the foot of the tree was a bowlder, and upon it the doomed man was forced to sit, surrounded by those who clamored for his life.

Tom Jones, mounted on an adjacent bowlder, yelled for order, and the crowd at once became still as death.

"I doesn't suppose that any preliminary biz is necessary, citz," he said. "This hyer slab-sided, bull-necked cuss hes bustled inter our box like a roarin' grizzly hankerin' fer blood. He tuck advantage of our horsepittalerty, we-'uns not keerin' ter come slap down on a stranger, by gittin' the drap on us, makin' the hull crowd feel like a passel o' dod-blasted fresh fools! He made every fu'st-class cit o' Sardine-box take a peep inter the muzzle o' his sixes without givin' us ary a show; an' thet are enough ter hang him, fer this thing mustn't git out, or we're a ruined burg. Next he sots up the butcher biz in our street, carvin' a man's in'ards inter bash, right under our noses. He looked like a XXX chap, an' probably 'tended ter locate with us. Every man in this hyer crowd are a witness ter this; an' now, all what favors a moderate chokin' off fer the murderin' cuss by slingin' him up fer buzzard-bait, jest elervate yer gravel-scratchers."

Every hand was instantly raised, while fiendish shouts rent the air, and a rush was made toward the scout, who sat upon the bowlder perfectly unconcerned.

"Feller-citz! Oh, yes! Feller-citz!"

All recognized the voice of Hank Holbrook, who now appeared upon the scene, puffing like a porpoise, and reeling along the trail with his jug of whisky.

"Hur-ra-a-a-h for Hank!" yelled Tom Jones. "Jest in time fer ther cirkuss, old pard. Ther 'Bald-headed Eagle o' ther Rockies' are 'bout ter fly!"

"Bless my soul!" said Hank; "Sardine-box City are a-goin' ter the devil fast. Are yer all a-gitten' lunny thet yer can't slide a man inter kingdom come without all this fuss? Yer orter go ter Texas an' larn ther trade."

"Kin yer tie a boss hangman's knot?" asked the sheriff.

"Waal, I reckon I kin, without half tryin'."

"Sling a lariat over that big limb, boys!" ordered Tom Jones. "Now, Hank, proceed ter biz, ole man."

"All set!" roared Hank, as he swung the noose.

"String him up!" cried out "Sport," "I'm a-bettin' thet he belongs ter ther 'Panthers,' an'

they may make a dash round this way ter rescue him."

This speech caused those who had begun to be favorably impressed by the prisoner's daring to draw back and consult as to the justice of hanging the man without learning more about him, to rush again toward the bowlder, clamoring for the instant execution of the sentence.

Tom Jones ordered him to stand up, which he promptly did, and the noose was quickly adjusted; while a dozen miners grasped the slack, ready to draw him up to the limb, without stopping to consider, in their excitement, that he had taken no advantage, but had killed his man in fair fight.

"Now," said the sberiff, "sling us yer real handle. We-'uns would like ter know who yer is; an' hit won't do yer any good ter glide outen this territory without tellin' hit. What did yer carve thet stranger fer? An' what name must we set down on the burg's books? We-'uns is doin' this thing reg'lar, an' we wants ter hev hit all recorded."

"Start yer cirkuss!" yelled the giant scout, recklessly. "Yer kin hang me up, an' set me down on ther books es ther 'Bald-headed Eagle o' ther Rockies,' fer I won't hev my name disgraced by sich Sardines as you-'uns."

"Waal, dod blast hit!" said Tom Jones; "ef we lets him sling any more gab, some on us'll be fer lettin' him levant. Pull him up, citz!"

With a loud cry the lariat was tightened; but at this instant a horse came with frantic bounds into the midst of the crowd, and upon the back of the animal was Dora Deane!

Her head was bare, and her long dark hair was flying in the wind. In each hand she held, cocked, a silver-mounted revolver. Bringing the horse, which all recognized as the animal that had belonged to the man who had been killed by the giant scout, to his haunches, she leveled her weapons, and called out in firm tones that rung like a bell:

"Drop that rope, or die!"

CHAPTER VI.

DORA'S RECKLESS RESOLVE.

THE landlady of the Nugget Hotel, after having prepared a square meal for her fair guest, and taken it to the room in which she had left her, saw, to her disappointment, the young lady reclining upon the table, and fast asleep. She hesitated but a moment, and then approached the table and awoke her.

"I wouldn't bother yer," said Mrs. Holbrook, by way of apology; "but I knows yer needs ter eat, ter keep up."

"Thank you. You are very kind. I have been writing, and was so fatigued that I fell asleep."

Gathering her papers together, she followed the landlady into an adjoining apartment; and, having seated herself, thus began:

"Mrs. Holbrook, I have much to say to you, by way of explaining my present position and future plans, and would be pleased if you could spare me a little of your time to-morrow forenoon."

"Well, dearie, I hope you'll get a good night's rest; an' I'll see thet ther 'boys' don't make a rumpuss in ther bar."

"I shall sleep soundly, I have no doubt, and the noise below stairs is not likely to disturb me."

"Reckon, miss, yer doesn't know much 'bout Arizony boys. Some o' them 'u'd raise ther dead when they gits a-drinkin'," and the landlady, with a parting smile, departed.

Dora ate heartily, and then retired to rest, passing the night in sweet repose.

Promptly, the following morning, Mrs. Holbrook made her appearance in Dora's apartments, and was welcomed by her guest. In the confidential conversation that followed, the young lady explained her position, and gave into the hands of her hostess the package of papers she had written the previous evening.

During the disclosure of her plans, the landlady gazed at Dora in mute amazement, speechless at the cool manner in which this young and inexperienced girl announced what she intended to do; and when her guest opened her trunk and displayed its contents, the old lady raised her hands in increased wonderment.

First, she took from the trunk her buckskin suit, including boots with the spurs attached. Next, she held up to the admiring gaze of Mrs. Holbrook, a silver-mounted Mexican saddle, with a bridle, and a gaudy *serape*, or blanket. Lastly, Dora exhibited her arms, which consisted of a pair of Colt's revolvers and a Sharp's rifle, a belt, and a neat bullet-pouch, containing everything requisite in the shape of ammunition.

"Oh, lordy me, Miss Dean! I declar' I never heerd tell o' sich desp'rit doin's! Yer'll be shot by ther 'Panthers,' er sculpt by ther 'Paches, dead sure an' sart'in!"

"I shall brave every danger," said Dora, firmly; "so do not try to influence me. You will, I know, keep my secret. Do not even tell your husband. Can you secrete my trunk where he will not chance upon it?"

"I kin shove hit under my bed, I reckon. Hit won't be very hefty fer me ter tote after yer gits them togs outen hit. But, lordy, ef thet brother o' yourn is dead, why, he's dead; hit won't do ary good ter shed tears over his grave. Yer life are wu'th more'n all ther gold in ther Territory. I declar' ter grashus, I never did feel so sot back 'bout a stranger! I kinder cottons ter yer like yer war a blood relation."

"And now, my good friend," said Dora, "you must do all you can to assist me. This buckskin suit was my poor murdered brother's, which he had thought to wear at a masquerade; and now I go in it to hunt his assassin. My first step must be to find some man to accompany me. Have you ever heard of such a person as the Bald Head of the Rockies?"

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Mrs. Holbrook, "how come yer ter know 'bout him? I knowed him when we fu'st slapped up a shanty at Gold Gulch, but I never see'd him in this burg."

"He has a donkey, or a burro, as you call it, generally with him, has he not?"

"Thet's the pilgrim, dead sure," said the old woman.

At this moment a series of revolver-shots startled both the women to their feet.

"Then I must look out the window." And

regardless of Mrs. Holbrook's protestations, the maiden went into the room in front, and glanced through the casement.

The first object that caught the attention of Dora was a huge borderman, seated upon the ground in the middle of the street, and a burro standing listlessly by his side.

At once it occurred to her that this man might be the very person of whom she had just been speaking; and the presence of the animal by his side was strong proof to her mind that her surmise was the correct one. She was unable, however, to prevail upon her landlady to venture into the front room for the purpose of identifying him.

Dazed with horror, she watched the encounter of the giant with the horseman; and, faint and sick, she staggered back into a chair, as the stranger fell dead on the street. Just then, Mrs. Holbrook reappeared.

"One man killed, an' they's goin' ter hang ther pilgrim," she said.

"They shall not hang him!" exclaimed Dora, with flashing eyes. "I will save him, or die myself. The man they are about to lynch is Giant George. I know it. He was my brother's friend; and I will save him, or perish in the attempt!"

As she spoke she buckled on her belt, in which were her revolvers and bowie, and rushed past the astonished landlady, down the stairs, and into the open air.

Near the back entrance stood the horse of the man who had just been killed; the animal being still saddled and bridled, having galloped into the yard of the Nugget when its master had been pulled from its back.

Springing into the saddle, Dora Deane whirled the horse about, and dashed into the canyon, to save the man who, she felt sure, had wiped the death-sweat from her brother's brow!

CHAPTER VII.

THE SCOUT AS AN ESCORT.

THE lynchers dropped the lariat as if it had been a serpent. Had an angel from Heaven come down into their midst, folded her wings and addressed them, they would not have been more impressed or astonished.

Never were the thoughts and feelings of men more suddenly changed. Not a sound broke the deathlike stillness, as all gazed, open-mouthed, at the daring girl seated upon the horse, her eyes flashing and her delicate, jeweled fingers curled around the fateful triggers.

But an instant she sat thus; and then, drawing a small knife and urging the horse close up to the boulder, she cut the cords that bound the hands of the giant scout, and then, springing from the saddle to the rock, she reached upward and severed the noose by another dexterous cut.

This done, she returned the knife to its sheath, and once more her silvery voice broke the stillness:

"He who harms this man must do so over my corpse! This man is the friend of those who need friendship, and the foe of crime. I am proud to stand by his side and defend him against a merciless and cowardly crowd!"

Probably no one in the assemblage was more

astonished than the man who had just been saved from an ignominious death. Showing no concern nor sign of fear when the deadly noose was about his neck, he now gazed upon the lovely girl by his side with every mark of amazement imprinted upon his usually stoical countenance.

Looking around her with the poise and manner of a tragedy queen, the beautiful Dora made a picture that would have charmed the gaze of even a more highly cultured audience.

The spell that had fallen upon the just now desperate mob was at last broken by Hank Holbrook, who, in a voice made hoarse by the damp air of the canyon and frequent potations, yelled:

"Hur-ra-a-ah fer ther Ang'l o' Penarlayno Rangel!"

No sooner had these words left his lips than a series of rousing cheers rent the air, and, during this commotion, Dora Deane turned to the giant scout and said, in a low, hurried tone:

"You do not know me, Giant George. I am the sister of Samuel Lawrence, who died, with his hand in yours, at Dead Man's Gulch. You nursed him and buried him. You were his friend to the death. I have much to say to you. Can you not tell these men who and what you are and why you forced that stranger into a duel and killed him?"

"Heavens above!" cried out Giant George; "ef you is Sam Lawrence's sister I'll do anything I kin fer yer, though hit cuts me ter hev my leetle game sp'iled. Thar's another cuss in this crowd I hes ter go fer, an' him what I dissected up yunder war one o' the 'Panthers.' Jess listen ter me. Hit's my put in now." Then, turning to the cheering crowd and raising his hand, his voice rung out clear to the outer circle:

"Sardines, listen ter a white man! Pilgrims an' tender-huffs, an' sand-scratchers, an' rock-smashers, an' keard-flippers, listen ter an ole-timer what meandered through Arizony a heap o' moons 'fore any o' yer ever heer'd a 'Pache yell! Yer orter know a squar' man when yer gits yer peepers nter him, but hit seems yer don't. Since I 'roved in this burg I've hed some fun mixed up with a leetle biz. Doesn't yer know me, Tom Jones?"

As Giant George asked this question he jerked his tattered sombrero from his head and bent forward, showing a bare and circular wound on the top of his head. At the same time he pulled a long mass of false beard from his face and resumed an upright position.

"Wa-al, dod blast my cats!" roared the sheriff. "Hank Holbrook, we're a set of thunderin' soft-headed fools!" So saying he grasped the giant by the hand. "Dog-goned ef yer hadn't orter bin strung up, though, fer foolin' us thet a-way! What kind of a trail is yer on, an' who war ther gerloot yer knifed jess now?"

"Yer mought find out ef yer 'zaminid his saddle-bags!" was the reply, as he pointed toward the horse.

At this half a dozen men sprung forward and tore open the saddle-bags, but in the midst of this they were surprised by the sound of a pistol-shot near at hand, and looking up they saw Giant George spring between Dora Deane and

the canyon, evidently with the purpose of shielding her.

Before the smoke had cleared he grasped one of Dora's revolvers, and firing with the quickness of thought, sprung through the crowd as a yell of pain came from the direction of the canyon. They all looked, and saw "Sport" running for life, his arm swaying unnaturally by his side, and Giant George in hot pursuit.

But a very short time did the unequal race last; for, coming up to him, the giant lifted the "Sport" bodily over his head, holding him upward at arm's length, his face ghastly with pain and fear, his arm having been broken by the shot of Giant George.

"I winged him a-purpuss, pards," said the scout; "an' ef yer feels bad 'bout yer cirkuss bein' sp'iled, stick his head inter ther noose what yer tied fer me. What hes yer found in the saddle-bags, boys?"

In answer, one of the searchers held up to view a black cloth mask; and Tom Jones displayed a package of drafts, checks and greenbacks inclosed in variously directed letters, the ends of the envelopes being torn away.

"Who war ther man, George?" asked Tom; "an' who war ther 'Sport' what's bin mixin' with us Sardines o' late?"

"Ther cuss what I sent up ther 'tume war Black Ben. I reckon yer heerd me sling his cog when I went fer him with my sticker. He war a sort o' second-class boss in ther 'Panthers,' an' this coward gerloot are a spy fer ther same outfit. Ef yer doesn't keer to sling him up ter ther mesquite, I'll pitch him inter the canyon."

"Mercy! mercy!" yelled the wretch. "Give me my life an' I'll peach. I'll lead you to the cave of the 'Panthers!'"

"Yer can't sling ary thing o' thet sort at me," said Giant George. "I knows ther hull biz of 'El Capitan.' Hit shows how cussed low an' mean yer are, ter blow on yer pards. I swore to clean out ther 'Panthers,' an' yer hes got only a few breaths left; so give yer tongue a job at prayin' lively, though I doesn't s'pose hit'll do yer any good, fer I reckon ye're checked through ter whar yer won't be 'bleeged ter lay up any dead wood fer the winter."

As Giant George spoke he lowered the trembling "Sport" to the ground among the crowd. At the same time he caught sight of Dora Deane standing by herself on the boulder.

"Pards," he added, "jess friz onter this condemned spes'mun o' deviltry, an' I'll kinder git ther Angel back ter Hank's, fer we does'n want her ter see sich a sight noways." And, delivering the spy, now shuddering with horror, and unable to keep his eyes from the swaying lariat, the scout spoke a word or two to Tom Jones in explanation of his departure; then, leading the black horse to the boulder, and returning to Dora her revolver, he said:

"Leetle gal, I hain't got no extry gab ter sling at yer, fer I hain't edjucated, an' doesn't mix with caliker-kivered humans, but I'll see yer bime-by. Jess clim' this horse ag'in, an' I'll 'scort yer ter ther Nugget, fer I opines ye're a-stoppin' thar."

"Yes, my friend; and I shall be thankful if you will accompany me, for, now that your life is not in danger, I do not feel as courageous

as I did, and I would be more at ease away from these excited men. However, I shall school myself to feel at home among all classes who reside in this Territory. This is my first venture at braving the glances and the anger of bordermen, but it is not likely to be my last."

Mounting the horse, Dora rode through the midst of the "citz," Giant George walking by her side, and with his hand upon the neck of the black steed.

All lifted their sombreros in respect, as he passed.

Hank Holbrook strove to regain his feet to follow, still clinging to his cherished jug; but, falling backward and spilling some of the whisky over the grass, he was forced to content himself with yelling:

"Rah-h-h-h fer ther Ang'l o' Penarlayno Range."

CHAPTER VIII.

A PUT-UP JOB.

"How did yer come ter know who I war, leetle gal?" asked Giant George, as he walked along by the side of the black horse and its fair rider. "Hit kinder mixes me up, this biz. Who tole yer 'bout me an' Sam at Dead Man's Gulch?"

"I will explain everything that appears strange to you," replied Dora. "But do not mention to any one who I am, or what my real name is. Call me Dora Deane for the present. Do you think those men would really have hanged you; and do you imagine they would have shot me, when you speak of my narrow escape?" As the young girl asked these questions, she gazed inquiringly into the scout's face.

They had just ridden between the shanties on the west side of the street, when Giant George suddenly reeled against the flanks of her horse, and fell to the ground within ten feet of the body of his late adversary, Black Ben.

Springing to the ground, filled with intense concern and grief, Dora allowed the animal to go free, and drawing one of her revolvers, she fired three shots into the air in quick succession, and bending over her prostrate escort, now saw that the torn shirt and tattered buckskin on his left side was covered with blood; and, in an instant, the truth flashed upon her mind.

He had shielded her, when upon the bowlder, from the random shot of the reckless and terrified "Sport," by springing before her; and, in this way, had received the wound, which he had never once referred to.

With tears streaming down her cheeks, Dora Deane knelt in the dust of the street by the side of the rough, burly borderman who had nursed and buried her brother, and had now, for all she knew, received his death-shot in her place.

The sheriff, who had, as well as the "citz," heard the reports of Dora's revolver, hastily appointed a guard over "Sport," and rushed with the crowd, *en masse*, under the impression that the "Panthers" were raiding the town.

When they broke into the street, and saw Giant George prostrate, with the "Ang'l" bending over him, they were paralyzed.

"What ther dickens are comin' nex'?" cried Tom Jones. "Dang'd ef ther 'Ang'l ain't bin an' bored George! I never could understan'

kaliker, an' this last move jest clips ther wings of our 'Ang'l' chuck up ter ther shoulders."

As the sheriff spoke, he ran ahead of the crowd, and Dora, seeing their approach, arose at once to her feet.

"What's ther difficulty with George? Who fired them shots?" asked Tom, somewhat harshly and suspiciously; but as he detected the evident grief and concern of Dora, he raised his hat, and added: "'Scuse me, but he war one of ther bestest men that ever wore buckskin, an' we-'uns don't undercumstan' this here last play. Hit 'pears ormi'ty strange, fer George hain't a pilgrim what 'u'd say or do anything ter make a female woman git on ther rampage."

"He was shot," exclaimed Dora, excitedly, "by the man called 'Sport,' the bandit spy, when we were on the bowlder; and it was while attempting to save my life that he received the wound. But this is no time for talking, my friends. Bring him into the hotel, and if there is any one in the town who understands surgery, let him be called in at once. I fired my pistol as a signal for assistance, for he fell without a word, and I did not know what to do."

Willing hands now gently lifted the unconscious form, and bore him tenderly into the Nugget Hotel. Then, laying him upon the bar, Tom Jones quickly ran his bowie along the seams of the blood-stained shirt, and examined the wound, soon giving utterance to a yell of extreme joy.

"Some on yer skip, an' tell ther 'Ang'l' that George are all hunk. That ball skuted round a rib. He's jest wilted fer loss o' bleed, an' he'll come right side up with care. Sling out some whisk', an' I'll party quick fetch him ter Arizona. Tell Marm Holbrook ter tote some plaster an' rags this-a-way mighty suddint!"

All rushed at once to obey orders, and ended the shout of the glad tidings with the customary three cheers for "ther Ang'l o' Penarlayno Range."

A bucket of cold water was dashed over the head of the patient, who was then raised to a sitting posture, and a glass of liquor placed to his lips. The scout opened his eyes, looked around him in some little amazement, and then drank the whisky. Then throwing off the support of the "citz," he suddenly called out:

"What 'pears ter be the difficulty, pilgrims? What are broke loose in ther Sardine-box this time?"

"Yer needn't talk a bit," said Mrs. Holbrook, who now came in. "Jim, jest bandige his wound, an' I'll lead him inter ther kitchen. Yer gut ther bullet outen his side, I reckon; didn't yer, sheriff?"

"Yaas. Hit war only skin-deep. Ef ther lead hed kep' a-straight, hit would 'a' bin good-by 'Liza Jane!"

"Yer kin skip now," ordered the landlady, "all of you men-folks. I hes fixed up more wounds in Texas nor yer c'u'd shake a stick at in a month of Sund'ys. I'll take keer o' George; an' you-'uns what was goin' ter hang him, better find somebuddy what deserves bit. Thar's heaps o' them, I reckon. Bless my soul! Who'd 'a' thunk hit war George?"

And talking thus, while the scout lay back

and laughed, Mrs. Holbrook bustled about to repair the damages to his wardrobe, after first having dressed his wound in a really skillful manner.

The "citz," thus relieved from duty, began by confiscating a bottle of Hank's whisky, and then, with vengeful yells, rushed back to the mesquite tree.

"Sport" saw no mercy in their eyes, as they came bounding along in a mad mob, and he gave a cry of terror as he saw the sheriff tie another noose in the lariat.

"Fetch ther cuss up byer, boys!" yelled Tom Jones. "Say yer pra'rs, Sport, er whatever yer handle are, fer ther' hain't only a few breathes o' Arizony air left yer!"

Crouching upon his knees in abject terror, the miserable wretch begged piteously for his life; but he might as well have pleaded with the surrounding rocks. The "citz" held him upon his feet, while Tom thrust the deadly noose over his head; then, with a shriek of horror upon his lips, "Sport" shot upward into the air, drawn by the quick jerk of a score of sinewy arms.

As they were about returning from this scene of retributive justice, they came upon Hank in a drunken stupor, his arms clasped about the whisky-jug. Tom Jones came to a halt, lifting his hat with one hand and running the fingers of the other through his hair, as if in deep thought.

A moment the worthy sheriff stood thus, the miners gathering around him; then, stepping forward and taking the jug from the grasp of the unconscious landlord, he shook it.

A smile of satisfaction passed over Tom's face as, for a full minute, he tipped it skyward before passing it to the eager hands that awaited it. He then said to the crowd:

"We'll hev ter put up a job on Hank, dead sure. He's lef' hisself open fer hit. Take a hold on ter his legs, an' we'll sot him on ter ther bowlder. Less keep ther cirkuss a-goin'. Some o' yer git some dead-wood limbs ter brace him up. We'll spread him a comfer'ble lay-out, though hit won't be es soft es a feather-bed."

Carefully the "citz" carried the insensible Hank, and without awaking him, laid him upon the rock in such a position that the first object that would meet his fuddled gaze on his return to consciousness would be the swaying corpse of "Sport," just in front and above him. This done, the empty jug was suspended by the side of the bandit spy.

"Now, boys," said Tom, "some o' yer go ter ther street an' fotch Black Ben. We doesn't want our burg disgraced with sich scum. We'll hang him up t'other side ther jug. Hit'll be mighty aggervatin' ter Hank, fer he'll be too dod-blasted skeered ter help hisself ter a drink, which is what he's dead sure ter hanker fer the fu'st thing."

The corpse of Black Ben was soon in the required position, and truly these excellent "citz" had planned to furnish Hank with a surfeit of horrors, since these ghastly, contorted faces, mingled with the shifting panoramic display of unearthly pictures that was pretty certain to be conjured up in his brain by his protracted indulgence in his favorite beverage, might

cause him to lose the little reason that he had forever.

All being arranged in a manner that was satisfactory to the entire party, with the exception of Hank Holbrook, the "citz" made their way to the O. K. saloon, not wishing to place themselves in the way of Mrs. Holbrook.

A messenger was dispatched to inquire as to the condition of Giant George, who returned and reported that the scout was doing well, and was just then apparently in very earnest consultation with the "Ang'l."

"Wa-al, dod blast hit!" burst out Tom Jones, in surprise and some indignation. "Pards, we hev'n't hed time ter think o' what hev bin goin' on. Things hes bin on ther whiz in this burg since ther Ang'l roved in ther hearse from Gold Gulch. How does ary one reckon did ther Ang'l know ther war sich a pilgrim es Giant George? Secou'ly, es ther gospil-slingers puts it, how come she ter know hit war him, when we-uns didn't recog' him? An', number three, what biz hev she got with him that driv her so dang'd desp'rit like thet she'd 'a' plug'd a ball inter ther man what would 'a' pulled a rope onter him? She'd 'a' done hit, boys, fer her eyes war es full of shute es thet dang'd burro's ears is o' wood-ticks."

But we need not record the long and stormy arguments, pro and con, which, duly sandwiched with drinks, kept the O. K. Saloon for hours in a perfect uproar.

Various were the reasons advanced to explain why the "Ang'l" had interfered with the hanging of the giant scout.

Some asserted that she would have done the same for any man in like position; but the stringing up of "Sport" proved this conclusion to be an erroneous one, for she well knew what his fate would be when they left the hotel.

The more and the longer that the "citz" talked the matter over, the more puzzled and confused they became; but the unanimous decision was, that, although Giant George was "as square and as white a man" as there was in the entire territory, he must not be permitted to monopolize the friendship and the society of "ther Ang'l o' Penarlayno Range," for she belonged to the "citz" collectively of Sardine-box City.

CHAPTER IX.

ON THE TRAIL FOR REVENGE.

THE recovery of Giant George, under Mrs. Holbrook's care and skill, was a rapid one.

"I'm dog-goned 'bleeged ter yer, Marm Holbrook, fer yer doctorin'," he said, as he got up and paced the kitchen; "but I wonder whar Don Diablo has squatted? He giner'ly makes out ter take keer of hisself, but he orter hev ther kiack tuck offen him, ter gi'n his back a airin'."

"Don't yer fret 'bout ther burro," said the landlady; "he's in the back yard snatchin' grass lively. T'other critter's thar, too. I tell yer, Miss Dora's no slouch on a hoss, ef she did come from ther States; for she jest went a-kitin' thet time, ter stop ther boys from hangin' yer. Why didn't yer let ther 'citz' know who you was, an' what trail yer was onter? How did yer 'spect ter git outen the scrape?"

"I thought I wouldn't spile ther fun till the last minit. 'Sides I war watchin' how 'Sport' war goin' ter perceed; but I hed ther dead wood enter them all ther time, an' should 'a' tuck it in about tew shakes of a big horn's tail."

"And I should be pleased to have you explain how you proposed to escape death," said Dora Deane, as she came into the kitchen, and took the scout's hand. "I am extremely rejoiced to find you so much better. Does not your wound pain you very much?"

"Nary," replied Giant George; "I had forgot all 'bout hit. Hit's nothin' but a scratch, but ther bleedin' kinder weakened me; 'sides my head goes back on me since I got a ounce ball inter hit. But I'm a-feelin' just hunk, an' ready fer biz ag'in."

"Do sit down and rest yourself," urged Dora.

"I doesn't keer ter take a sot down, 'less hit's on ther perrarar grass, or enter a bowlder. I hain't used ter cheers. But I'll 'splain things fer yer. When Tom Jones war a-makin' his leetle speech thet time on ther rock, I gi'n Don Diablo ther wink; an' he, seein' I war in a tight fix, got up t'other side o' me, tuck ther lariat 'tween his teeth, an' purty soon chewed ther raw hide nigh in tow. I'tended ter snap the rest on hit, jerk ther rope over ther limb, an' upshot them what hed a holt enter hit. Then I'd 'a' gut clear o' ther crowd, grabbed 'Sport,' an' skuted for the canyon, whar I'd 'a' throwd ther cuss over, an' stompeded."

"What a daring exploit that would have been!" said Dora; "but would you not have been riddled with bullets?"

"Nary bullet," was the reply. "Ther boys hedn't got thar sixes out, an' I'd 'a' done ther biz up, on ther whiz."

"It makes me shud ler to think of it. I shall never forget the sight. What was your object in keeping quiet?"

"Wa-al, I cum inter this burg 'specially arter Sport, an' I didn't keer ter be know'd. I war tryin' ter git up a row in ther O. K., jest ter git rid ov him in a reg'lar way. But these Sardines interfered with my game."

"I hope that your plans and mine are the same now, George. Will you come up-stairs and have a talk, where there is no danger of our being overheard?"

Much puzzled, the scout followed both females; and, after they were seated, Dora explained the source of her information in regard to him. She then gave him a full detail of her own history, with the wrongs that herself and family had suffered at the hands of Edward Willoughby; now 'El Capitan,' the chief of the "Panthers."

She then expressed a desire to have her new-found friend guide her to her brother's grave; and, after assisting in finding his gold, aid her also in keeping her vow of vengeance. She displayed her arms and costume, and announced her intention to disguise herself as a young man and leave Sardine-box City at the earliest moment, allowing the people to remain in ignorance of her movements, or her business in Arizona.

The giant scout listened to all this with sur-

prise and admiration, and expressed himself as eager to take the trail to avenge her wrongs; and, at the same time, proud of the implicit confidence and trust placed in him.

Never before had Giant George been so affected by the words of a female; and her anxiety to hasten her departure was so manifest that he proposed to start that very night, and within a few hours.

"But you cannot go. Think of your wound!" said Dora.

"Does I 'pear like a infant? Don't yer fret 'bout me. Git ready, Miss Dora, an' we'll skip ther burg. Yer kin confiskate Black Ben's hoss, an' me an' Don Diablo kin keep 'long side jest es easy."

"I should like so much to go at once," was the reply; "but I should never forgive myself, if you should be ill."

"I hev asserwated thet we'll levant, an' we'll not waste any more gab over hit. We'll glide out when you's ready."

"I can be ready within an hour; but you must call me Dick Deane when you next see me." So saying, the young girl at once set about her preparations.

Giant George followed the landlady downstairs; and the latter proceeded to put up a quantity of food for her guests to take with them, all the while muttering her protests against the wild and dangerous scheme. So busy was Mrs. Holbrook, that not a thought of Hank entered her mind. Had she known his present predicament, well-used to frontier ways as she was, she would have shuddered with horror, and shrunk from going to his assistance.

There was a bright moon; and, as the departure must, for many reasons, be a secret one, the scout had saddled and bridled the black horse in the rear of the hotel. Don Diablo was destined to carry the supply of commissary stores which the excellent landlady had hurriedly prepared. When the animals were ready for the road, Giant George returned to the kitchen, and, as he entered, Dora came down the stairs in her disguise, carrying also her revolvers and rifle.

"Wa-al, I do declar'," said Mrs. Holbrook, "ef I hedn't 'a' know'd yer war goin' ter change yer rig, I'd 'a' bin dead shure a stranger war in ther ranch! Whar's yer ha'r? Yer ain't cut hit off, I doesn't reckon."

"No," said Dick Deane, as we must now call our heroine, "it's done up in a knot on the top of my head. Do I look very much like a man?"

"Yer the dog gone-dest bestest lookin' man in Arizony!" exclaimed George in admiration, "an' I'm a-gamblin' heavy enter hit. How did yer git smoked so?"

"I brought a preparation with me that colors my skin quite brown," was the self-satisfied reply.

"Wa-al," said the landlady; "I'm not used ter prayin' much, but I'm goin't ter ax the good Lord ter watch over yer, though I don't reckon He bothers Hisself much 'bout folks what ain't got more sense nor ter squat in Arizony!"

"Well," said Dick, in a business-like manner, "we mustn't keep you up all night. We had better be moving, if all is favorable. Do you not think so, George?"

"That suits me ter a dot," replied the scout. "Don Diablo an' ther black hoss is ready, an' so is I. Come on, everything is hunk, all sot. Marm Holbrook, take keer yerself. We'll see yer ag'in 'fore this moon gits through hits biz." And with these words, the scout walked off.

Dick took leave of the landlady in a manner that was so affectionate that it would have caused Hank to rave, had he witnessed it, and then followed her guide. The strange party, the giant scout marching by the side of his little burro, the young maiden, in her perfect disguise as a youthful borderman, mounted on her strangely acquired possession—her borrowed steed of midnight hue—left the now quiet scenes of the late strangely perturbed Sardine-box City, passed along the rear of the long line of shanties east of the street, and, disappearing among the boulders and stunted cedars, were soon well started on their strange mission of vengeance.

It was the witching hour of midnight, and the bright moon cast its silvery rays down through the scant foliage of the mesquite upon the rubicund face of Hank Holbrook, who still lay in a drunken stupor, bolstered up on the huge boulder. They fell, too, upon the slowly swaying forms of the "Sport" and Black Ben, his brother bandit; at times seeming almost to smile upon the ghastly, hideous spectacle. A score or more of sneaking, cowardly coyotes, peering from the bushes, and among the rocks, jerked out in concert their short, sharp barks of impatience and hunger at the sight. At last, a long-drawn howl sounded from the canyon, and the coyotes became silent. A second broke upon the air, louder and more piercing; and, the next moment, an immense black wolf of the Llanos sprung from the canyon trail, its long tongue hanging from its jaws, and its red eyes glowing with hunger.

For an instant the fierce beast shot fiery glances around; then its eyes became fastened upon the swinging corpses of the bandits, and again a piercing howl echoed amid the clefts, canyons and foot-hills, as the brute bounded toward, and sprung upon the boulder, its open mouth uplifted, and its ravenous gaze upturned.

CHAPTER X.

HORROR UPON HORROR.

THE last howl of the wolf pierced even the whisky-numbed ears of Hank Holbrook; and slowly his heavy lids opened, their muscles being at this time the only portions of his frame that were subservient to his will.

Slowly his brain recovered sufficiently to allow the return of his natural power of sight, but he was, so to speak, chained to the rock. At first, the scene appeared to be nothing more than a continuation of the realistic visions that had been presented to his mind's eye during his drunken slumbers; the terror and dread at the sight of which, he had been unable to manifest by groan, or gesture. But now, as the moon cast its brilliant rays down upon him, and the cool breeze fanned his heated brow, he gradually realized the horrors by which he was surrounded; without, however, being able to bridge over in his mind, and connect the present with the past.

Nothing within the scope of his vision served to remind him of Sardine-box City; for the

reason that, in his recumbent position, none of the familiar outlines of the landscape were within his view. Nothing but the limbs of a tree, from which hung the horrible forms with their glassy protruding eyes, and the huge beast, with its lolling tongue and glittering teeth, all outlined, terribly distinct, against the clear mirror of a silvery sky.

At length the wolf arose, and springing upward, clutched at, and snapped its teeth into a leg of Black Ben; but the corpse swaying far outward, caused the beast to lose its balance and fall from the boulder snarling with rage, its claws clutching wildly down the steep side of the rock with a blood-chilling sound. The hair of Hank's head began to crawl and writhe like scorched serpents, and his brain seemed like molten metal.

Not for an instant, in his state of mind, could Hank have supposed that he was upon the earth—much less, within a rifle-shot of his own hotel in Sardine-box City.

There was little time, however, for him to digest these thoughts; for the maddened wolf sprung again upon the boulder, this time striking heavily upon his stiffened limbs. The wolf's eyes, which had previously been drawn upward, now became fixed upon the form and features of Hank, and its cold, repulsive nose and lolling tongue were drawn over his face, causing him the utmost horror and dread. But whether the breath of the landlord, so powerfully scented with vile whisky, was too much for the beast, or whether the animal knew by instinct that danger to itself lurked in those rolling eyes, who can tell? But it drew aside and made ready to spring upward again toward the slowly oscillating corpse of Black Ben.

To describe the terror and despair of Hank at this moment, would be impossible. Slowly his fuddled brain began to realize that he was still in the flesh.

There hung the jug—another link that bound him to earth, although the fact that it was its contents that bound him to the boulder did not occur to him—and the "make-up" and features of the "Sport" were also familiar to him. His mind graspings were soon broken in upon by the wolf, which made another desperate bound; this time forcing the body of Black Ben afar out, the beast falling, with a maddened snarl, to the earth below.

The corpse of the bandit came whirling back, the rope parted, and the horrible thing fell with a heavy thud upon the rock within six inches of Hank's head; its glassy eyes seeming to gaze into his with a demoniac stare, and its cold, clammy limbs touching him.

One wild, unearthly yell of fear and horror burst from the lips of Hank, which broke the terrible spell; and, with a gigantic bound he gained his feet and sprung from the fearful spot, falling from the boulder directly down upon the wolf, the two rolling over upon the sward, the man clutching the throat of the beast with furious strength, until both came to the verge of the canyon.

Here Hank gained his feet, and, his strength doubled by his danger, hurled the howling beast over the dizzy height. Then, panting with ex-

ertion, he looked around on the silent, moonlit scene with a cold, unearthly shudder.

A moment only gazed he thus, for a nameless fascination drew his attention beyond, within the shadows of the cedars, where a sight met his eye that caused the blood to congeal in his veins; for he knew that this time death, real death, hovered around and about him.

Here and there, among the rocks and cedars, were near a score of men, mounted upon black steeds, their faces covered with sable masks, through the holes of which glittered eyes that burned into the soul of Hank Holbrook.

Straight for the Nugget went Hank; his short legs flying over the ground as they had never done before, his unearthly yells sounding strange and fearful through the silent town, when suddenly the door of the O. K. opened, and the "citz," who had been making another night of it, rushed pell-mell into the street, just in time to see Hank as he disappeared around the corner of the Nugget, headlong.

When the crowd recognized their friend Hank and began to recall the trick they had played upon him, they burst into the most uproarious laughter, venting their mirth by pounding each other, some shaking hands, some leaping up and down in the spasms of merriment that convulsed them; when—presto change!—their extreme hilarity was quickly quenched, for a complete phalanx of black steeds, with black-draped riders wheeled into the street, stretching entirely across it, and then came thundering down upon them in a mad gallop, while the night-air was filled with a rattling fusilade of revolver-shots.

Surprised and demoralized, the "citz" fled in a wild stampede, right and left, between the shanties, leaving some half-dozen of their number dead or wounded in the street, over which thundered the death-dealing platoon. Then, whirling their steeds about quickly, the night-riders galloped, with increased speed, back in the direction of the gallows-tree.

Hank Holbrook, reaching his castle in nominal safety, burst in the rear door of the Nugget, and fell prone and senseless upon the floor.

CHAPTER XI.

MRS. HOLBROOK ON THE RAMPAGE.

THE landlady of the Nugget, awakened by her husband, grasped a shot-gun and rushed, in her night-dress out of doors just as the bandits opened fire; and when the "Panthers" returned, the old woman, crouching by the corner of the building, brought her gun to bear, and pulled the trigger.

A yell of agony rent the air, as one of the band threw up his hands and fell to the earth; his horse, wounded by the scattering shot, galloping down the street. At the same time, Tom Jones, with a score of men at his back, dashed toward the Nugget, firing as they charged; but the bandits, with yells of derision, spurred away at full speed toward the canyon.

Sardine-box City was again in a fearful uproar. Four good and true men lay dead, two more were severely wounded; but the most humiliating feature of the whole case was that Marm Holbrook had killed one of the Panthers.

"I tell yer, pards, we're ruined!" said Tom Jones, in a voice full of excitement and rage. "We mought as well pull up stakes an' git, fer this hyer thing 'll spread 'round ther country, an' we'll be ther laughin'-stock of all Arizony, dead sure! Jest think; a woman defendin' ther burg, plum alone, an' wipin' out one o' ther 'Panthers!' Ther town's plum bu'sted, pards, an' no mistake," added the sheriff, as he made sure that the bandit was really dead. "I'll throw up my persish hyer, an' crawl inter a kiote hole, er go on a ole drunk; I duzn't keer a dang which! But jest wait a minnit fu'st. Stay where yer is, pards; tew many mought sp'ile my game. I guess hit's recorded thet I've gut a ball in my six as'll be inside human meat 'fore yer gits through breathin' hard!"

Down the street ran Tom, just as the bandits were spurring their horses into the cedars beyond the boulder. Quick as a flash he raised his revolvers, and with great rapidity fired twelve shots toward the "Panthers." Then, reckless and desperate, he rushed on, yelling like an Apache.

His ruse succeeded; for the bandits, thinking that the citizens were upon them in full force, galloped away, leaving another of their number dead near the mesquite.

"Reckon I ain't quite so slouchy, arter all," said the sheriff, in soliloquy. "But hit won't do. We'll hev ter buy Marm Holbrook out. Git her ter sw'ar she never see'd a shot-gun, ner fired ary thing in her life but a flat-iron, an' thet at Hank's head. Hit'll kill ther burg ef it does git out; an' I'm dog-goned ef I'd own up ter bein' Sheriff o' Sardine-box, proud es I are o' it!"

Making sure that the bandit was dead, Tom mounted his horse and spurred up to the boulder, still soliloquizing:

"Wa-al, dod blast my cats! Thet Hank must 'a' bin 'bout skeered ter death; fer ther rope broke, an' let Black Ben down on top o' him!" And Tom was forced to lie back on his horse and roar with laughter, at the imaginary appearance of Hank, as he awoke from his slumbers, and found a dead man lying beside him.

"Hallo! What's thet?" continued Tom; and, loosening the lariat from the horn of the saddle, he dismounted and sprung upon the rock, while he tore a placard from the jug. Remounting, the sheriff spurred toward the street; reading, as he went, the following words, in large letters:

"To Tom Jones, of Sardine-box City:—

"SHERIFF JONES:—The Panthers are watching you and the town. They will make a jump to-night, but you will only feel our claws. Drive Giant George from your burg within twenty-four hours, or you will feel our teeth. You have hung two of my men, and shot two. I will forget this, if G. G. is sent on a westward trail within the time I have specified. Otherwise, I'll hang as many Sardines as you have killed of my men.

EL CAPITAN."

By the time that Tom had reached the street, he had studied out enough of the words to get the gist of the meaning of the placard, and he resolved to assemble the "citz," and read the notice in public; first calling up Giant George.

The dead had been prepared for burial, and

the wounded were being cared for. Mrs. Holbrook had been greatly worried as to how she was to account for the absence of the scout and Dora; but now an idea entered her mind which she thought would be the means, if carried out, of clearing her own skirts.

Mounting the stairs, she scattered the covering of Dora's bed in all directions about the room, upset everything generally, and left the room in such a state that any one would suppose a struggle had taken place in it.

This done, she returned to the bar, and locked herself in. When, therefore, Tom Jones knocked at the front entrance, he was greeted with a warning from the landlady:

"Git from thar, or I'll bore yer, dead sure!"

Remembering the recent exhibition of her skill in that line, the sheriff sprung to one side, and yelled:

"Don't pull trigger, Marm Holbrook! It's me, Tom Jones; es dry es a ball o' cotton, an' plum full o' biz. Open ther door, an' shake up Giant George, will yer?"

The landlady lit a candle, and admitted Tom; who, the first thing, caught sight of Hank as he lay senseless on the floor.

"What ther dickens are up with Hank?" he asked, in pretended surprise; not wishing Mrs. Holbrook to know that he had been concerned in the trick that had been played.

"Don't yer ax me! I'm blest ef I know! I wish ter grasbus I war back Texas-way, fer this burg are a-goin' ter ther devil es fast as it kin glide. I know thet much."

"Slide out a leetle p'ison, Marm Holbrook. I reckon ye're 'bout ke rect. Ther burg would bu'st up sart'in sure, ef you wer'n't located hyer. Yer showed fu'st-class pluck ter-night when yer dropped thet Panther."

"Yer axed fer George," said the landlady. "I don't know whar he is, nor whar nobuddy is. Hain't he bin with yer? I locked myself in hyer with Hank, an' ther's a rumpus bin goin' on all ther time. Unlock thet door thar, an' call him, I reckon he's sleepin' on the floor o' ther kitchen, 'less he's dead!"

Tom obeyed, but returned quickly, with a look of surprise.

"Thar ain't no George thar, an' everythin's all mixed up. Yer better glide up an' see ef ther Ang'l's all serene."

Up-stairs went the landlady, and came back instantly, with an assumed scared look, and exclaimed:

"She are gone, an' everythin' knocked a-kitn'! Ther 'Panthers' must 'a' took her an' George both! I shall go crazy."

"Wa-al, dod blast my cats!" said the sheriff, in wonder and concern, as he rushed up the stairs, and then down, and out upon the street, where he met a crowd of the "citz." Screaming out, with perfectly insane rage, he said:

"Pards! Sardine-box City air bu'sted, sure enough! Ther 'Panthers' hes tuck Giant George an' ther 'Ang'l o' Penarlayno Range!"

It was the culminating evil of this night of terror; the climax of all the horrors, real and imaginary, that had been of late accumulating. The gloomy prediction of the worthy sheriff of the ill-starred burg seemed in a fair way of being accomplished. The dark threat of the ban-

dit chief had been fulfilled more speedily than could have been apprehended. It was more, indeed, than the claws of the "Panthers" that had left their impression. The "Sardines" had already begun to feel their teeth.

CHAPTER XII.

EL CAPITAN AT HOME.

WHEN Bald Head of the Rockies and his companion left Sardine-box City they made a detour and struck the stage route a mile south of the town. They took advantage of every gully, motte and line of bowlders, to prevent being seen from the rising ground; and lucky it was that they did so, or El Capitan would certainly have discovered them on his march.

The scout walked in advance, taking long strides, Don Diablo following in a slow trot, and Dora Deane bringing up the rear. The silence of the night, the weird, moonlit scenes, and the long, dark, grotesque shadows, impressed the young girl greatly, while the thought that she was now approaching the grave of her murdered brother, contributed to fill her mind with feelings such as she had never before known.

Far from friends and home, disguised and in male attire, and journeying in company with one who would be deemed by her former associates as a savage, surrounded by wild beasts and by wilder human beings, hers was indeed a situation such as might well have appalled any one. But as all these, and more, were forced upon her mind, she urged her horse onward, raised her clinched hand on high, and repeated her vow of vengeance in order that she might smother down her weaker nature and nurse the daring and the resolution that were necessary to its accomplishment.

At last they arrived at a branch of the canyon which led directly toward Pinaleno Range, when the scout made halt, looked back, and then, raising his hand in air, turned into the ravine toward a huge wall of rock half screened from view by cedars and clumps of nopal.

Dora followed, and came up to her strange escort, as he stood facing her, and with his arms folded.

They were now in a vast natural amphitheater, which was the termination of the gulch. Behind them the mountain rose gradually in the form of huge steps, these being covered with clumps of cacti, dwarf pines and cedars.

To the right and left its sides were of the same formation, and here stood Giant George in the center of the circle, his back to the north, where the vast adamantine range of rocks towered upward toward the sky.

"Wa-al, Dick, we hes 'roved. I hope yer hain't fagged out by ther ride," said the scout, quietly.

"Oh, no! I am not in the least fatigued," was the reply. "I have been so much interested in the strange, wild country through which we have passed, that the journey has not seemed long to me. I see that we can proceed no further in this direction. Do you intend to encamp here for the remainder of the night?"

"We hes gut ter ther end of our trail fer ter-night, Dick. Ef you'll glide a leetle ways on, thar's a cozy place ter camp abind ther pines. Jess slide offen yer nag, an' I'll lead ther boss.

Yer see that Don Diablo knows mighty well whar he are."

Dora looked in the direction which the scout pointed out, and saw the burro disappearing among the trees. Then she dismounted and followed Giant George as he led the horse. Soon they came into a small, clear space. The surface of this opening was covered with a carpet of grass, and the animals at once lowered their heads and began feeding.

"Does yer see that black spot, Dick?" asked the scout.

"Yes, I do see something like a pile of ashes," she replied.

"That's jest what hit are, Dick. Hit's ther spot whar I cooked fer yer brother while he war sick, though he didn't eat enough ter keep a hummin'-bird alive."

Dora's face became deathly pale, and she grasped the arm of her friend with both her hands, trembling like a leaf, while she asked, in a low, husky voice:

"You do not mean to tell me, George—you do not mean that Samuel died here? It cannot be that in this short space of time we have reached his grave?"

Her look and manner showed that she knew it. The scout, without a word, led her to the pines at the base of the mountain; and then, parting the branches, pointed within. The moonlight, shooting through the foliage, disclosed to the girl a rude wooden cross at the head of a mound; and, staggering forward, she threw herself upon the sod, sobbing beyond the power of self-control.

Giant George removed his sombrero and stepped at once away from the sacred spot. Crossing the grass-grown plot, he called softly to Don Diablo; and the burro, although enjoying its feast, followed its master, who entered a thicket some twenty yards from the grave, and, unpacking the kiack, prepared to encamp for the night.

Scarcely had the form of the scout disappeared from view, when two men, their faces concealed by black masks, stepped out into the opening, and toward the motte in which the disguised girl was weeping over the grave. The bandits carried a sack and a gag in their hands.

With a quick glance in the direction that Giant George had taken, they entered the motte; and, the next instant Dora Deane was gagged and bound, the sack drawn over her head and shoulders, and she hurried along to the east side of the basin. In ten minutes from the time that the scout had left the weeping girl, she was bound to a horse, and, riding between the two bandits, was being taken at headlong speed away from her only friend and protector—away from her murdered brother's grave.

On the morning following the visit of the bandits to Sardine-box City, as the sun was just gilding the peaks of Pinaleno Range, the same party of horsemen were proceeding in a line, one after another, though the pines at the base of the mountains some ten miles northwest from the town, through the streets of which they had charged the previous night, leaving death in their trail.

Turning abruptly toward the mountain range they entered a narrow cleft between the high granite walls.

Their leader followed this dark fissure for a few yards, when a hoarse summons brought him to a halt.

"Who goes there?"

"El Capitan," is the prompt reply.

"Pass on!"

The file of black steeds proceeded on; passing, first one masked sentinel, and then another, until they entered a lovely valley of not more than five acres in extent, with high walls upon every side.

Across this they walked their horses, and entered beneath the shade of a luxuriant motte of pines. A short passage was traversed, when they reached a large chamber; and here the bandits dismounted. It was filled with stores of every description, for both man and beast; as well as with arms, ammunition, saddles and blankets in abundance.

The leader of the gang sprang from his horse, leaving it to the care of the others, and strode into the east passage, lighting a candle that stood in a niche in the wall.

As it kindled into a blaze, it disclosed a rough log partition, evidently of recent construction; and the bandit leader, drawing a ponderous key, unlocked and threw open a door, and then, with the candle in his hand, entered, closing the heavy door with a clang. The chamber which he entered was of considerable extent. In the middle of it was a long table, upon which were standing a dozen wax candles, which he ignited, and soon the arched cavern was brilliantly illuminated. Tearing off his mask, and running his fingers through his black wavy hair, the chief began to pace the apartment impatiently. He was of medium height, and well-formed, and his face would have been called extremely handsome, had it not been for the marks of debauchery, and the deep lines of utter recklessness and desperation.

His eyes were black, snake-like and treacherous, and his curled black mustache and pointed, glittering teeth gave him the expression of a panther at bay.

Pacing the room with quick strides, he burst out:

"By all the gods, it has been a most eventful night for our band! Two hung, two shot two wounded, and the treasury not one dollar richer. Curse the luck! It was a black day that I left the vicinity of Santa Fe; but the Vigilance Committee made it too hot for me in that section. If I could only find the nuggets that Sam Lawrence secreted I would quit the mountains and return to St. Louis. Hal ha!"—the laugh was a fiendish one—"I have kept my oath as far as possible, taking time into consideration. Miss Lena Lawrence knows by this time that she has been the cause of her father's ruin and her brother's murder. Murder, did I say? Yes, murder! for I shot him like a dog, and laughed in his face as his eyes grew filmy in death; but he was cunning enough to hide his gold far from his camp. It was a streak of pure luck that my bullet missed its mark in Colorado, and his life was spared to dig gold for me, for I'll have the princely fortune that he hid if I have

to consume months in the search. Luckily, I picked up the little book in which he kept a record of each day's find, and by that I know the extent of the pile that he stowed away; but so far all my search has been fruitless. If the fellow should have written to any one in regard to his luck, and they ascertain that he is dead, they will very likely come to hunt for the treasure; and, if he sent a plan of any kind to guide them, I shall be sure of the gold, for my spies are on the watch, night and day. If I do find Sam Lawrence's gold—and I am very sure to do it, even if I am obliged to search every foot of Pinaleno Range from this point to Sardine-box City—I will, within a month after, revel in the smiles of Lena Lawrence, and spend her dead brother's gold in placing her in her former position in society. Then, when I tire of her, I will reveal the source from which her luxuries have been derived, and, holding up my delicate digit, shall tell her that it pulled the trigger that sent a bullet into the breast of her noble brother Sam, and that the wolves of Arizona tore his body limb from limb. Ye gods! that will be revenge worth having—revenge most sweet—but not one-half as devilish as the vixen merits, who scorned the only love I ever felt for woman—the love of the now infamous El Capitan."

On he went, still pacing the floor, and soliloquizing:

"Yes, she shall know all in time. But the first thing to be done is to find the gold. The poor deluded fools who shall come across it, if they knew my mind, would never reveal the hiding-place, for they shall die as soon as the secret is mine. 'Dead men tell no tales' is an old adage, and a true one. Come in!" he exclaimed, slipping his revolvers around on his belt as he spoke, handy for use, while a peculiar tap sounded on the door.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CAPTIVE.

THE heavy door swung open, and a man entered, removing his mask as he did so.

"Well, Burke! What brought you from duty this time?"

"News from the grave," was the strange response.

"Hal ha! Pretty good; Burke, you're a wit, but you choose a strange subject. What have you seen?"

"We have captured a young prairie sport in Devil's Washbowl, and brought him in. I think he must be some relative of the man you shot, for he was lying on the grave. I have obeyed orders, and searched him, but have found nothing on his person. He was well dressed, in a new suit of Rio Grande buckskin."

"Where have you placed the fellow, Burke?"

"In the north cave, El Capitan."

"You have done well. I am sorry, however, that you have found no papers. But if he knows the hiding-place of Sam Lawrence's gold, I'll have it out of him in some way. You and Strong had better get your breakfast, and then return and keep a sharp lookout, for I think it more than probable that Tom Jones may lead a *posse comitatus* from Sardine-box on our trail.

Take a drink, Burke. I'll attend to the captive, and pump him after I get a rest."

A few minutes previous to this interview, Burke and his comrade had borne Dora Deane into the passage to the right of the main entrance of the cave; and, after cutting the bonds and removing the sack and gag, thrust her into the darkness.

Then they lit a candle, which they placed inside the door, and proceeded to make their report to their chief.

When Dora Deane was thus suddenly seized before she could get a glimpse of her captors, she was so startled that she could not collect her thoughts; soon, however, she caught enough, from their conversation, to know that she was in the power of the "Panthers," and all hope for the time being left her.

After a time she began to reason that Giant George would not long remain in ignorance as to where, and by whom she had been taken. She felt assured that the brave scout would not sleep, or indeed think of remaining in the basin a single moment after finding that she was gone; but would he find the trail? He had intimated to her that he knew of a secret way of entering the retreat of the "Panthers;" but, would he at once conclude that she was in the power of El Capitan? The more she thought upon the subject, the more confident she became that George would take effective steps toward her release.

These thoughts produced a more composed and confident frame of mind; and, when her bonds were removed and she was pushed into the dark cavern, she felt greatly relieved. Drawing from the leg of her boot a long slender knife, she resolved to defend herself if intruded upon by any of the gang.

Grasping the candle, the light from which did not extend six feet, she held it upward, but nothing except outer darkness met her eyes. She followed the walls entirely around, but could discover no opening. There was no outlet except by the passage; and even were it possible to cut through the door, there were no doubt the guards on its opposite side.

The more Dora pondered upon her desperate and dangerous situation, the more she became convinced that naught but the most cunning strategy on the part of the scout could release her.

At last she seated herself upon the stone floor, and remained in this position for a long time, gazing at the dim light of the candle, and listening for any sound that might be made; but all was silent as the grave.

How long she remained thus, she knew not; but suddenly she was brought to her feet by the grating of a key, and a man entered, closing and locking the door behind him.

The blood seemed to congeal in Dora's veins, and her breath came in gasps, as she drew back from the light; for, on the instant, she had recognized Edward Willoughby, the dastard who had been the curse of her family and of her own life—the murderer of her darling brother, and now known as El Capitan, the merciless chief of the "Panthers!"

Such was the young girl's loathing for this man that she came near falling; but, like a flash came the thought that all was lost, that her

brother's murder and her father's ruin would remain unavenged if she faltered; and, collecting all her strength of mind and body, she folded her arms and, with her hand clutching the hilt of her concealed dagger, she began to walk boldly up and down the cave, while El Capitan gazed upon her with evident curiosity.

Luckily for Dora, the darkness had prevented the bandit from observing her long hair, which the removal of her sombrero by her captors had somewhat disarranged.

"Who are you, my game-cock! And what were you doing at the grave in the Devil's Wash-bowl?"

No sooner had El Capitan put this question, in a hoarse voice which showed that he had been drinking heavily, than a new idea flashed through Dora's brain. She turned and confronted him, standing facing him, and with her eyes only now and then flashed a direct look into her face.

Springing to one side, he grasped the candle, and rushing toward her, set it upon the floor near her feet, and then stared into her face in utter amazement. His eyes bulged out in superstitious horror, and his form began to tremble from head to foot. The dim, flickering candle threw out a fitful and ghastly light.

Speechless for a full minute, the bandit screamed:

"They lied! They have brought the corpse of Sam Lawrence! I have killed you twice, and still you stand before me with the semblance of life. Man, or devil, die again!"

Drawing his bowie, he rushed toward the terrified girl, but, at this instant, a huge fragment of the rock fell from above with a thundering crash between the bandit chief and his intended victim. The candle was extinguished by the rush of air, and the cavern was left in darkness.

With a wild shriek, El Capitan sprang backward, and fled through the darkness, as though the fiends were in pursuit.

Dora, now doubly frightened by the crash of the huge stone so near her person, stood listening with all her soul, and heard the head of the chief strike with great force against the wall, and the next moment his limp body fell heavily upon the floor of the cavern.

She was alone now with the senseless El Capitan! Alone with her brother's murderer! She was entombed with him, and vengeance was within her grasp; but she cried out from her inmost soul, as she fell to her knees, her hands clasped, and her lips quivering—"God help me!"

CHAPTER XIV

THE SECRET SHAFT.

BALD HEAD had quietly seated himself beneath the pines, to await for the grief of his charge to subside.

He knew that the scene was enough to unnerve any one, especially a young and delicate girl; but he judged from what he had seen of Dora, that she would soon recover her self-control, and drown her anguish in her strong and all-absorbing desire for revenge.

Becoming at last a little impatient, the scout arose and walked into the opening, where he stood and listened.

All was still except the champing of the animals, as they tore the fresh rich grass from the sod. At once the form of the scout straightened up, and he whirled about, his face showing signs of surprise, mingled with alarm, for the distant clatter of horses' hoofs over stony ground fell upon his ear. Pausing but a moment to make sure that he could not be mistaken, he ran toward the motte, in which he had left Dora Deane.

Parting the branches, he glanced into the shades, calling out:

"Dick, ther's danger 'mong ther canyons! Ther 'Panthers' is out!"

Receiving no answer, he crawled through to the grave. There was the rude cross, but Dora was nowhere to be seen. Again he cried out, with deep anxiety in his voice:

"Dick! O-o-o-h, Dick!" But his words were thrown back in his teeth from the crags and rifts beyond.

Back into the opening he bounded; and, like an enraged beast, tore up the rocky shelves of the Devil's Wash-bowl.

Gaining a position that commanded a view to the westward, the keen eyes of Giant George ranged over the foot-hills in that direction; as if he knew, by the sounds that he had heard, the course the steeds were taking.

Again the same sounds struck his ear, proving that the night-riders were crossing a belt of stony ground. Shading his eyes with his broad palm, he looked intently toward the point which his keen, practiced sense of hearing enabled him to locate with almost a nicety of exactness.

Soon a horseman came into view; the moon lighting him up, and showing, as he turned to gaze behind him, that he was masked. Another quickly followed, and then another; the position of the middle rider, with no arms in view, showing that he was partly enveloped in a sack, with his arms bound, the leader having in his hand a lariat attached to the neck of the animal. Giant George was no longer in doubt as to the identity of the captive. Dora Deane was in the hands of her brother's murderer!

This flashed upon the mind of the scout when he saw that his charge was not in the motte; and he was now positive that such was the case, although confident that the bandits could have no knowledge as to the character and sex of their prisoner. Then, as the terrible danger of the inexperienced girl broke upon him, he raved madly.

"Jumpin' Jericho! What a dog-goned fool I war ter 'low her outen my sight; but who'd 'a' thunk ther danged maskers war 'round this-a-ways? I hopes ter be chawed inter saddle-strings by a grizzly, ef I doesn't save her from ther pesky perrarer pirates. Ef they pulls one ha'r outen her head I'll tortur' every dod-blasted one of 'em! I'll tie up El Capitan, with a stake through his 'natomy, an' leave him fer ther wolves an' buzzards!"

Rattling these words off, as he looked after the fast disappearing trio of horsemen, Giant George sprang down into the basin and hastily

secreted the rifle, saddle and bridle of Dick Deane in a fissure of the rocks near the grave.

He then detached the lariat from the black horse, allowing him to go free, procured another rope from his own stores, and threw the kiack and its contents into the thicket.

This done, he caught Don Diablo in his powerful arms, carried him up the west side of the basin, and set him upon his feet; then, giving a low whistle, the giant scout proceeded with long strides in a northwest direction, among the rocks and pines, the burro following like a dog.

Not half a mile had they gone, when Giant George was brought to a halt by the sound of hoofs; and, secreting himself and his brute companion, he awaited developments.

The next moment a horseman came jogging along at an easy gait and the scout, with a joyful cry, revealed himself.

"Terrif, ye're jest ther man I'm dog-goned glad ter see! Whar yer bin, an' whar yer goin'?"

Recognizing the man before him, the horseman leaned down and grasped the hand of the scout, saying:

"Well, George, you are the last man I expected to see around loose. You must have had good care, or you would not be able to be about. How is your wound?"

"Ther scratch are all hunk. Marm Holbrook patched me up," answered the scout with a show of impatience.

"What's up? I've been hunting Tom Jones's bay mare, but without success; an' I'm on my way now back to the city. Tom offered me ten dollars to bring the nag in, but I reckon the 'Panthers' must have corraled her."

"Wa-al, Terrif, I'll give yer twicet ten, ef yer'll do what I tells yer. Yer knows thet Ang'l what 'roved at Sardine-box City from ther gulch, in ther bearse?"

"I should just say that I did," was the prompt reply.

"Wa-al, ther gal is tuck. Tuck by ther 'Panthers!' An' I wants yer ter skate, quick es hoss-meat'll tote yer, arter Tom an' the boys. I knows all 'bout ther cave of El Capitan, an' I'll gi'n yer a plan on bark fer Tom, so he'll hev plain trav'lin'. We'll clean out ther hull o' ther maskers this time, or I'm a dod-blasted liar!"

"All right! I'm your man," said the youngster.

"Thet's hunk! Then I wants yer ter take this same trail hyer, arter yer hesgut ther boys started on ther west side o' ther Range; an' yer'll find me in a pine motte, nigh ther bottom o' ther Peak, whar ther three pines stands. We'll kinder feel o' ther 'Panthers'' claws afore ther boys lights down t'other side."

While he was speaking, Giant George had cut a square piece of bark from an adjacent tree, and was marking with his bowie the outlines of the Pinaleno Range, and the points to guide the sheriff to the bandits' mountain retreat.

Passing the bark to Terrif, as he finished, he added:

"Thar she are! Plain an' squar' es ther nose enter yer face. Don't spar' hoss-meat, an' take

a fresh mount es yer glides back; fer I wants yer with me, speedy."

"I'll fill the bill, clear the whole business. Good-by!"

Driving his spurs home, the cowboy disappeared through the pines in the direction of Sardine box City; and Giant George went quickly up the Range, followed by Don Diablo.

When the morning sun gilded the Peaks of Pinaleno Range, and shot its golden arrows through the three pines that towered high above the "Panthers'" fastness, the giant scout, half bent, his keen eyes wandering hither and thither, made his way along the bed of a deep fissure, which seemed to have been caused by some violent eruption of nature that had half sundered the range.

Through the middle of the motte that lay beyond, was a clearly defined trail, evidently made by wild beasts, and, following the same for some yards, the scout parted the branches on one side of the path, and urging Don Diablo to enter, crawled after, and allowed the branches to fly back into their natural position.

For some yards further the advance was difficult, there being a dense undergrowth of thorns; but these were soon passed, and a yawning cavity was next reached, its sides being rough and easy of descent by one who had been accustomed to that kind of mountain travel.

"Jess linger right thar, Don Diablo, an' yer needn't git lonesome ef yer doesn't get a peep at my b'utiful pictur' fer some lengthy periods. Fact are, I mought never come up at 'all, so we'll shake, ole pard!"

The next moment the scout started down on his dangerous journey into the bowels of the mountains. Suddenly he paused, and a low ejaculation burst from his lips.

"Cuss my cats! I'm a blunderin' ole fool, for I've bin hyer afore, an' never see'd thet branch hole. Hit 'pears ter me thet humans hes bin in thar, an' I'll jist 'zamine things, though I can't spar' much time."

With some difficulty he crawled into a cavity that branched off from one side of the shaft. Proceeding for a short distance, by feeling about in the darkness, he concluded that he had reached a cave-chamber. Striking a light with flint and steel, he ignited a pine knot. When the torch blazed up, a cry of joy escaped from the scout, for just in front of him was a box, roughly hewn from a log, and on which was nailed a horse-shoe.

"Jingo! Ef hyer ain't a reg'lar streak o' stud-horse luck! If these hyer ain't Sam Lawrence's nuggets, I'm a liar. He wanted ter tell me whar it war afore he started on ther long trail, but he couldn't make hit out clear. Howsomever, I won't disturb nuthin' until I gits Dick outen ther claws o' ther 'Panthers.'"

Giant George, after commenting thus in regard to his discovery, returned to the shaft, and began to descend. Feeling his way slowly, he came to a bar of wood that extended across the shaft, and which had evidently been placed there by himself on a former occasion. Here he made fast the ends of the two lariats, and dexterously forming a double rope by tying them together at intervals, he was about to begin his descent, when he suddenly became

conscious that the regions below were partially illuminated, and he heard the sound of a human voice.

Bending down and gazing along the shaft, he saw the form of a man whom he knew to be El Capitan. The place appeared to be a large cavern, into which the shaft led by way of the roof. While Giant George thus looked down upon the scene in wonder, he saw the bandit chief, with knife in hand, rush along the cave-chamber, seemingly about to spring upon some one with murderous intent. The scout, without pausing for an instant, seized a large, loose rock that lay upon a shelf near him, and hurled it downward, without any previous calculation as to where the fearful missile would strike. He heard the crash of the ponderous projectile upon the rocky floor of the cave, followed by a blood-curdling shriek, and then all was still and dark below—still and dark as the grave!

CHAPTER XV.

THE ARRIVAL.

"PARDS! Sardine-box are bu'sted! Ther 'Panthers' hes tuck Bald Head of the Rockies, an' ther Ang'l o' Penarlayno Range!"

When Tom Jones yelled these words to the crowd of "citz" who had been busy attending to the wounded, and preparing the dead for burial; wild cries of rage, and clamors for immediate pursuit filled the air.

"Yer needn't be so dang'd eager ter scatter yer corpuses 'mong ther foot-hills," said Tom. "Yer all knows thet yer can't buck ag'in' ther 'Panthers' when ther murderin' cusses hes took ter the'r hole. Fact are, we-'uns didn't hev no show. We hes gut ter find out whar ther cave are, an' this we can't do till Giant George shows up. He ain't ther pilgrim ter stop long with them, ef they hes gut him corraled. They 'll hev ter bore es many holes in his carkiss es ther' is in a cream-skimmer, er he'll knife a few o' 'em, an' levant back this-a-ways. Thar must 'a' bin some o' 'em skuted 'round back o' ther Nugget, an' scooped in George an' ther Ang'l. Come inter ther Nugget, pards, an' I'll read El Capitan's leetle speech ter yer, an' then we'll pump Hank, ef he's gut his idees back on ther squar'. Reckon he's gut a strong appertite ter sign ther pledge 'bout now."

The "citz" crowded into the bar, and although they were filled with grief at the loss of their friends, and deeply concerned in regard to the future of the town, they could not refrain from laughter as the form of Hank Holbrook met their view. The worthy landlord was stretched upon the floor, and his features were still stamped with the unmistakable impress of horror, although he had again relapsed into unconsciousness.

The noisy, protracted meeting in the O. K. saloon, close followed by the charge of the "Panthers," had driven all thoughts of Hank from the minds of those who had conceived and carried out the plan that came so near being his death; but now, seeing him prostrate and senseless, and imagining the effects of the "surprise party" which they had gotten up for his especial benefit, they could not control their mirth, but burst into perfect roars.

"Pards," said Tom Jones, "I know hit war a

mighty mean trick we-'uns played on Hank, but hit loosened his j'int's most surprisin'ly, fer I see'd him come jest a-tarin' up ther street ahead o' ther 'Panthers,' his eyes stickin' out like El Paso onions, an' yer could 'a' played seven-up onter his coat-tails. I'll give him a reg'lar sockdolager of a drink, an' that will fetch him 'round, I reckon."

When the sheriff had entered the bar, Mrs. Holbrook, having had no rest during the night, delivered up the keys, telling Tom to "take keer o' things," and retired to bed, resolved to get her usual sleep, if the "Panthers" carried off the whole town.

A number of the "citz" now raised Hank to a sitting posture, and Tom Jones poured a pitcher of cold water upon his head, and down his back.

"Yer see, pards," explained Tom, "hit wouldn't do ter fotch Hank 'round too suddint-like. I'll jest irrigate his outside systematics in a perlimentary way, ter kinder loosen his skin, so he won't 'splode in pure joy when ther whisk' gins ter work. Now pass ther bug-juice, an' don't sample hit too heavy on ther way. Hyer, Hank, ole pard, take a snifter, an' come back ter Arizony;" and Tom pressed the glass to the landlord's lips, and poured the fiery liquor down his throat.

"Dog-goned ef he doesn't swaller es nat'ral an' es easy es a suckin' calf," said Tom, with a loud laugh; "an' he's a-openin' his eyes, which looks like a couple o' fried aigs in bacon grease. Brace up, Hank, an' take yer nat'ral persish ahint ther bar."

The landlord's eyes rolled wildly, his hands clutched a moment at the empty air; then, recognizing familiar faces, he shuddered convulsively, and with some assistance gained his feet, but was forced to catch the arms of those who were nearest to support himself.

Looking for a moment around the room, which resounded with laughter, and beginning to realize that he was in his own home, he staggered behind the bar, winking and blinking like an owl at noontide.

"Read the keard, Tom! Read the keard!" shouted several of the "citz," and the sheriff jumped upon the bar, and in a loud voice, but not without difficulty, and the substitution of words of his own for those which he was unable to pronounce or understand, he read the notice which he had found on the jug at the boulder, and which was signed by El Capitan, the Chief of the Panthers.

Hank paid as much attention as he could, under the circumstances, waiting very impatiently until Tom had folded the paper; then he took another stiff horn.

"Tell us what yer see'd, Hank," said the sheriff. "Whar yer bin? Yer look like yer hed bin playin' Merzeppa, an' got a purty tough drag through Tophet."

"What did you boys leave me fer?" were Hank's first words.

"Leave yer?" said Tom in feigned surprise. "Yer hain't bin with we-'uns at all. We hain't see'd yer since we hung 'Sport.' Whar yer bin, an' what struck yer?"

"Feller-'citz,'" explained the landlord, "I've mixed with ther biggest ole cirkus an' menadg-

ery what ever struck Arizony; an' I'm gamblin' on hit heavy. I've hed a hefty struggle with about fifty Panthers. I hashed a few without gittin' a dang'd scratch; but they piled onter me a leetle too thick an' run me ter ther Nugget a stompedin', whar I intends ter stay hyerarter. Ef yer could shovel up pure dust by the pound from the bottom o' the canyon, I wouldn't stir a peg from abint this bar. I wouldn't pass another night outside ther Nugget for ther hull of Arizony, an' New Mexico counted in."

"Set 'em up, Hank! Your treat, Holbrook! Sling out yer bestest!" roared the "citz" with laughter.

While the crowd was drinking, the clatter of hoofs sounded in the street close at hand; and "Terrif," the cowboy, of whom some slight mention has been made, entered the bar in haste, and advancing through the crowd, placed a piece of bark in the hands of the sheriff.

"Giant George sent this, boys. I met him in the foot-hills, where I went to hunt for Tom's horse. The Panthers have got the lady who came in the stage. George wants you, Tom, to raise a crowd and come as quick as possible to help clean out El Capitan. He has drawn a map of the Range on this bark. Here is Devil's Wash-bowl, at the head of Dead Man's Gulch. There is the trail you are to follow. The cave of the 'Panthers' is nearly below the three pines, which you know is a landmark. Here he has marked down the North Star, which will help you to understand the route."

"Great-Gee-hoss-a-fat!" exclaimed Tom Jones. "George must think he bez ther dead wood on El Capitan this bitch. Whar yer goin', Terrif? Can't yer guide us, boy?"

"No; for I promised George to go with him on the other side of the Range. He proposes to enter the cave by some way known to himself. There is a long, narrow passage, which is guarded by two of the 'Panthers,' after passing which, you enter a little valley, inclosed on all sides by high walls of rocks. Once into this, you will have the game safe."

"Boys!" yelled Tom Jones, "shill ther 'Ang'l o' Penarlayno Range' be murdered, an' ther citz o' Sardine-box stan' here pourin' down bug-juice? Who's goin' ter help clean out ther dang'd mounting pirts?"

Every man fell into line, and Tom, selecting twenty-five, ordered them to get ready at once for the trail.

At this moment a man came galloping rapidly down the stage-road from the direction of Gold Gulch and came to a halt, his horse covered with foam, within five feet of where the sheriff was standing.

Lifting his hat, the stranger, who was a remarkably handsome young man of some twenty-three or four years of age, asked in a hurried tone:

"Excuse me, sir, but did not a young lady by the name of Lena Lawrence arrive in this town two days ago on the stage from Gold Gulch?"

"Thar war a lady 'roved hyer, but I'm dang'd ef I knows her handle," answered Tom. "Marm Holbrook kin tell ye, I reckon. Howsomever, hit won't do yer any good ter know, fer ther 'Panthers' hes tuck her!"

"The Panthers, you say?" cried the stranger

in a husky voice, while his face turned pale with horror.

"That's what they calls theirselves; but they's road-agents."

"Great heavens!" said the stranger. "When did this occur?"

"They tuck her from the Nugget Hotel, an' we-uns air jest a-goin' ter skute up ther Range arter her. That's our biz, right now. We'll hev a tough fite, I reckon, afore we gits through with El Capitan an' his gang."

"El Capitan!" suddenly exclaimed the stranger.

"Ya-as. Does yer know ther cuss? Whar yer from, an' what biz hes yer gut with ther Ang'l?"

"The lady I have reference to is a life-long friend. This fiend, El Capitan, as he now calls himself, was the means of breaking up our engagement. His real name is Edward Willoughby. At one time he pretended to be my friend. He was also the friend of a brother of this young lady; but, as I have recently ascertained, he murdered him near this town. It has also come to my knowledge that Miss Lawrence came to Arizona with the sworn intention of avenging her brother's death. Show me a way to save her from the monster's power, my friends, and you shall have golden rewards."

"She disappeared last night," said Tom, "an' ther hull air a puzzle ter me. But say, stranger, now I think on it, thar's a man," and he pointed to "Terrif," "that's goin' ter j'ine Giant George on the trail right now. Ef yer glide along with him yer'll stan' the best show, I reckon."

Away at headlong speed dashed "Terrif" and the new arrival before Tom Jones had ceased speaking.

"Wa-al dod blast my cats!" exclaimed the latter; "things 'bout this byer burg is gittin' mixed wusser an' wusser. I b'lieve I'm gittin' lunny, or else Hank's whisk' are too strong, one or t'other. 'Pears like George run'd off w' ther Ang'l, then she gut tuck 'way from him, an' now hyer's another man arter her. I'll scrouge through this ef it bu'sts me up, an' Sardine-box City 'long with me!"

As Tom brought his soliloquy to a close the men whom he had selected for the expedition came galloping into the street from all directions, and in ten minutes they had filled their canteens at the Nugget, and, with the sheriff in their lead, were speeding away among the boulders.

The last words of the redoubtable Hank Holbrook, as he stood in the door of his bar, waving his hat by way of farewell, were:

"Don't yer show yer faces ag'in in Sardine-box City without yer fatches with yer ther Ang'l o' Penarlayno Range!"

CHAPTER XVI.

A SAD DISCOVERY.

GIANT GEORGE waited for some time at his perch in the shaft, expecting every moment that members of the band would rush into the cave below him with lights; but not a sound reached him. Grasping the doubled lariats, and igniting a pine knot, he went down the shaft until he reached the firm rock. There he gazed around,

holding his torch on high, and shading his eyes with his hand. He could hardly repress a cry of anguish, for, within five feet of him, stretched upon the stone floor, was the girl for whom he was in search.

Close by her side lay the rock he had hurled from above. His heart sprung to his throat, his brain whirled, as the thought flashed through his mind, that perhaps he had killed the brave girl who had dared so many perils that she might avenge her brother's murder.

Kneeling upon the floor of the cavern by her side, he raised her in his arms; when, to his extreme joy, he discovered no evidence of injury. She was, however, limp and senseless, and he knew not what was best to do. At last he remembered that he had secured a canteen of water about Don Diablo's neck, and forgetting, in his deep concern, the fact that he had seen the bandit leader in the cave, he caught the doubled lariats, and ascending to the cross-bar, quickly made his way to the surface. As he climbed the shaft he formed a plan in his mind, to build a barrier of rocks across the passage below, which would enable him to defend Dora against the bandits until Tom Jones and his men should attack them from the west.

So planning, the scout reached the mouth of the shaft; and, as he caught sight of the burro, he cried out:

"Dod blast hit, Don Diablo, I never hed ary a ten-strike o' pure luck without yer. Ef yer he ln't bin 'long, I'd never 'a' found Sam's box; an' es I'm a-wantin' the heaviest piece o' luck now, down yer goes, ef I breaks my fool neck a-totin' yer!"

With these words, the scout turned his back to the burro, while he stood on a ledge below the beast, caught its fore-legs, and clasped them around his neck. He then bent forward, and, with the other hand to guide his movements, began the descent. At the cross-bar he drew up the lariats, made them fast about the body of Don Diablo, and lowered the animal into the cavern, himself quickly following. Then, unloosing the canteen from the burro's neck, and releasing the patient beast from the lariats, he took up the torch, which he had left upon the floor, and, hastening to the side of the still senseless maiden, began to bathe her head and to moisten her lips.

"Poor leetle gal," he muttered; "she's plum beat out, an' thet cussed rock skeered her 'bout ter death. I'm gittin' ter be a out an' out ole fool, since I begun ter scout with a female woman. Dang'd ef I hedn't forgot thet El Capitan war in this hole when I drapp'd thet rock. Hit war a mighty lucky drap, I reckon; fer, es things 'pears, he war goin' ter knife Dick. It must 'a' bin him what yelled, but what for is a puzzle. Ther stun couldn't 'a' struck him, er he'd 'a' lair stiff. An' she hain't bin hurted, only skeered."

In this strain the giant scout talked, while he alternately moistened Dora's lips and bathed her head.

While he was thus occupied, the bandit chief, El Capitan, recovered his senses, and with difficulty raising himself to a sitting posture, gazed around him in utter bewilderment; his head and

face being covered with blood, giving him a most repulsive appearance.

Feeling around, his hand came in contact with a heavy club, and as he had lost his knife, he grasped this weapon, realizing that, although he was in his own stronghold, he was in great danger.

At first the weird scene seemed unearthly to him. Then he remembered that he had come face to face, within this cavern chamber, with a man who appeared to be the same that he had shot down months ago.

El Capitan was not only greatly mystified, but strangely moved. His mind was filled with superstitious visions, conjured up suddenly by a conscience that had previously given him no trouble, or if it did, it was speedily drowned in riot and dissipation.

Rising to his feet, he caught sight of the corpse-like face of the prostrate Dora and the gigantic man bending assiduously over her, himself in darkness.

He felt positive that no other mortals were in that portion of the retreat, and he now regretted having given permission to his band to encamp for the day on the opposite side of the valley, although at the time of granting them this favor he had wished to be free from their presence. How came this huge man whom he now saw before him in his cave? He did not belong to his band. There was no person in the country of such strength and stature except Giant George. It must be he. In some secret manner the scout had entered his stronghold. This meant ruin and an ignominious death, if the giant scout should be allowed to escape and reveal his secret.

With such thoughts in his mind, the danger to himself and his band uppermost, El Capitan removed his boots and walked stealthily over the floor of the cave toward his unsuspecting victim.

Gaining a favorable position, the bandit chief raised his club in air and struck Giant George a fearful blow upon the head. With a heavy groan, the scout fell by the side of Dora, and El Capitan was about to step forward, when, to his horror, he felt himself lifted bodily upward by something which had darted between his limbs from behind.

Quaking with terror, he clutched at the dread thing with both his hands. They came in contact with the cold nose of Don Diablo, and the bandit caught sight of a pair of devilish eyes gazing from a head of most unearthly shape—the ears of the burro were not in view, being held tight between El Capitan's legs—then he was hurled backward with great violence; his head struck the hard, cold granite, and with a cry of horror again, he lay senseless.

For some length of time neither of the three human beings gave any indication of life; but at last Dora Deane moaned, turned uneasily upon her hard bed of rock, and slowly opened her eyes. At first naught met her view except the darkness that filled the cavern; then she caught sight of the burro, which seemed to be a pleasant reminder, but still a mystery. Rising to a sitting posture, she saw that Giant George was lying near her, the blood flowing from a wound in his head; and with a cry of anguish

she caught his wrist and placed one hand upon his brow.

"Oh, God, spare him!" she cried in her agony. "Let not another noble life be sacrificed through the fiend El Capitan. Spare the life, oh, Father in Heaven, of this brave, unselfish man, and I will leave judgment and vengeance in Thy hands!"

Then, looking around, Dora saw the blood-stained form of the bandit chief, the fiend who had so wronged her and hers, and a convulsive shudder shook her frame, as the dread peril through which she had passed, came vividly before her. There lay the rock which, she felt sure, must have been hurled from some point by Giant George. She remembered, presently, that El Capitan had struck violently against the wall in the darkness. But he was now in the middle of the chamber; and the scout was there also, and senseless. This was proof, almost positive, that Giant George had, in some way, gained an entrance; and, in saving her life the second time, had been wounded by the bandit chief.

But if so, if the bandit had struck the scout to the floor, why had he not followed up his advantage, and murdered George and herself? And how came he again to be in a prostrate and senseless condition? It did not seem possible that each could have struck the other with blows that had bereft them of further power at the same moment. The more Dora pondered, the more confused she became. Then, seeing the canteen, which still contained a small quantity of water, she poured some of the cool liquid upon George's head.

Binding up his wound with her handkerchief, she replaced her hat; and, filled with dread forebodings, expecting each moment that some of the bandits would enter, she sat down by the side of the scout, and chafed his huge palms, while she prayed most fervently for his return to consciousness, and his restoration to strength and health; ready, all the while, at the slightest noise from the passage, to dash out the torch.

CHAPTER XVII.

HAND TO HAND, AND STEEL TO STEEL.

A NEW idea seemed, all of a sudden, to strike Don Diablo, for he pricked up his ears, and proceeded to walk about the cavern; smelling along the floor, here and there, in and out the circle of light cast by the burning pine-knot.

From the actions of the animal, Dora decided that it was hungry and was searching for food; but, as she watched the beast, she saw him, after a somewhat prolonged absence, walk out suddenly from the darkness with the ends of the two lariats, that had been knotted together, in his mouth, and chewing vigorously upon them, apparently with the greatest satisfaction. Still watching the burro, she saw that the lariats were drawn taut by the animal, and that they appeared to be stretched from the mouth of the beast upward to the roof of the cavern.

The presence of Giant George now ceased to be a mystery, for Dora now knew that he had descended from above; and that, from the same point also, he had hurled the rock through

the secret entrance—a passage which, she felt sure, must be unknown to the bandits, for, if this had been the case, the fall of the stone would not have terrified El Capitan as it certainly had done.

While these convictions were gradually brought home to her, her eyes were once more turned to the curious contortions of Don Diablo, in his efforts to masticate the tough raw-hide; and she was again surprised and somewhat alarmed by observing that the lariats were suddenly jerked, by some unseen power, away from the burro's jaws, and went swinging back into the darkness.

Dora was conscious that not only her own life, but that of Giant George, was in the greatest jeopardy, and she was now apprehensive of the appearance of enemies from any and every quarter.

She felt confident that a new danger threatened them from the secret entrance, for the scout had come alone to her rescue; so, grasping the torch, and with her knife in her hand, she advanced in the direction in which the lariats had disappeared.

But a few paces did she walk when the ropes again met her view, swaying and twitching, as though some person was descending; and, holding the torch above her head, she discovered a man coming down, hand under hand, with the most reckless haste.

Frightened beyond measure, her tongue seemed to cleave to the roof of her mouth, and for the moment she was unable to get her speech: but, throwing off, by a powerful effort, the dread that had taken possession of her, she cried out in as firm a voice as she could command:

"Who comes there?"

"A friend to Giant George, and to all honest men," was the reply, in a fearless voice, that caused Dora Deane to spring back, the blood rushing with increased velocity through her veins.

The next instant the new-comer, relinquishing his hold upon the rope, dropped upon the cavern floor, his face filled with deep concern; but he was blinded for the moment by the glare of the torch, which Dora had hastily thrust again into its former position, in a fissure in the rock. Taking her stand close to the prostrate form of her friend, the suspicious girl, her knife clutched tightly, stood now on the defensive, her eyes fastened upon the face of the stranger, her face pallid, and her form trembling, for the voice of the man before her had awakened a thousand and one tender memories of the past.

"God, I thank Thee!" broke from the stranger's lips, in earnest, heartfelt prayer. "At last, at last, I meet my reward! Lena Lawrence my long-lost darling, do you not know me? Have you forgotten Rudolph?"

The knife fell from the hand of the disguised girl upon the stone floor with a clang; and she sprung, with a wild cry of intense joy and relief, into the outstretched arms of the man who addressed her.

"Thank Heaven! Rudolph Reynolds, my first, my only, but long-lost love! Can it be possible that we have met again, and in this horrible place, or is it a dream?"

"Better to meet thus than never, my darling!" said Rudolph, as he held the trembling maiden to his heart; "this is no dream, and, thank God, you are unharmed!—But what means all this? I hope, I sincerely hope, that your noble protector, Giant George, is not dead. If he is, I shall terribly avenge him, as well as the wrongs that you have endured!"

"No, Rudolph; he is not dead, but badly bruised and unconscious. He has saved me twice from yonder fiend, who is no other than the wretch who for years professed to be your friend, and also the friend of my poor brother. He is Edward Willoughby, here known as El Capitan, the chief of the Panthers. But we are still in great danger, Rudolph; for the bandits may, at any moment, dash in, and murder us all. Is there no way of getting George up through that secret entrance by which you came? I do not know what to do, or what to say. Surely it must be that God has sent you to my aid, in the midst of my deepest distress. But it is the greatest mystery to me how you come to be in Arizona. This is no time, however, for explanations. Oh, Rudolph, do we meet thus, only to be parted by death?"

"I will not leave your side again, my darling, though a thousand bandits were on our trail. But, come, we must revive the giant scout. Our hopes center in him, for we cannot take him up the shaft, neither can we leave such a man to the mercy of these demons in human form."

"Ha! ha! ha!"

The laugh was a fiendish one, and rung through the arched cavern, causing Dora Deane to shrink back in horror and dread, and Rudolph to spring up from the side of Giant George to a posture of defiance.

"The gods smile upon you, but Satan favors his own," said El Capitan, who had revived, found his knife, and now stood, with the same tightly clutched in his hand; his black, snake-like eyes blazing with fury from out his blood-smearred face.

"Rudolph Reynolds, I see that you still live, and have walked into my parlor, as well as my long adored Lena. Come, we must fight for the fair prize! I scorn to call for help to secure such as you, although a score of good men and true only await my signal. My pretty Lena, your buckskins become you. I was a weak fool to suppose for a moment that Sam had arisen from his grave. I thank the fiends for leading your footsteps into my rocky bowers. I'll embrace you when my steel has found the heart of him who deserves not such a prize, or he would have gained it long ere this. Rudolph Reynolds, there is not room on the earth for both of us. Come!"

Not a word spoke Rudolph Reynolds; but with firm clinched bowie, half bent, with every muscle and sense braced and strained, for the conflict, he stole slowly toward the bloody bandit chief, conscious that the lives of Lena Lawrence and Giant George, as well as his own, depended upon his strength and skill; and also well aware that he had to deal with no novice in the use of steel.

Both men were nearly the same height, but El Captain was of more robust build. The loss

of blood, however, had somewhat weakened the bandit chief, which made them more nearly equal.

Never, perhaps, was there a more impressive scene.

Lena, standing by the torch, her face pale as death, her features stamped with horror and agonizing anxiety; while the man whom she loved more than her own life, and who had long been lost to her, was about to engage in deadly conflict with the wretch whom she loathed with an intensity that bordered on insanity.

So dazed was she by sudden surprises and horrors that, for the time, she forgot the insensible form of her noble protector, who lay prone upon the floor so near her; but the giant scout regained his consciousness, just at the moment that the two men sprung upon each other. Back and forth, over the cavern floor, they fought with insane desperation, their bowies throwing out sparks of fire.

Rising to a sitting posture, Giant George drew his hand quickly across his eyes, felt of his bandaged head, and then muttered to himself.

"What ther dickens are up now? Thet El Capitan kim nigh wipin' me out, dead sure, an' he 'pears ter hev more lives nor a cat. Dod blast hit! Ther hull crowd o' Panthers 'll be rushin' in onter us. Ther leetle gal are all hunk, thank ther Lord! An' now some strange gerloot hev dropped in ter keep up ther cirkuss, which 'll be all sp'iled ef I doesn't block up ther door, an' keep t'other hellyuns from stampedin' this-a-ways. Dang'd ef I ever see'd things git quite so mixed up afore. Don Diablo, ole pard, how is yer? 'Pears ter me he is right side up with care, ontill yit;" and springing to his feet, without paying any further attention to the pair who were engaged in the terrible fight, the scout picked up a pine knot which had fallen from his belt, ignited the same, and rushed across the cave to the passage, inserting the clear end of the torch in a cleft.

He then ran to one end of the cavern, where there was a pile of loose stones of some size, and began to carry them into the passage, laying them in a wall directly across the entrance.

Foaming at the mouth with desperate fury, El Capitan, frenzied by the thought that his hated rival might triumph over him, and win the maiden that he had sworn to himself a thousand times should be his slave, the bandit chief, with his eyes frozen upon the face of his opponent, strove by lightning-like play of steel, to bewilder and break the guard of the man, whom he hated with an intensity the most inhuman.

Lena Lawrence had been captured by his spies at the grave of her brother, disguised in male attire, and this proved that Sam Lawrence must have written to her previous to his death. If so, he had doubtless, feeling that his end was approaching, disclosed the secret hiding-place of his gold. By some means, it was certain, Lena had learned of her brother's death, and had come to Arizona to recover his treasure. El Capitan had no doubt of this, and the thought served to madden him doubly, for should he be killed, those whom he so much hated would

escape, and would enjoy the murdered man's wealth, thus rendering as naught all his well-laid plans of revenge.

On the other hand, should he kill Rudolph Reynolds, all his fondest hopes would be realized, for he would then have Lena Lawrence in his power, and could easily compel her to divulge the whereabouts of the concealed treasure of her brother.

When, however, Giant George revived, and El Capitan knew by his active movements that he was building a barricade across the passage that would prevent his band from joining him, or he them; then he began to perceive that all was lost, but determined, nevertheless, to kill his opponent, even if he himself should be slain the next moment. Thus, he felt, he would partly avenge himself upon Lena Lawrence, by blighting her life forever. And so he rushed wildly upon Rudolph, who, cool and calm as at the first, gave way, watching for an opportunity to thrust his adversary in a vital part.

Words cannot express the anxiety and the horror that racked the brain of Lena, and kept her still chained to the spot where she had stood when the two men, both so closely linked to her life, sprung into deadly conflict, and when she saw the furious onslaught of the bandit chief, before which her lover seemed to retreat, she darted across the cavern, and grasped the arm of Giant George, imploring him to shoot El Capitan, and save the life of Rudolph Reynolds.

"Who are he, anyway? Whar did ther pilgrim drap from?" demanded the giant scout.

"He has been the life-long friend of my brother Samuel and myself. He is Rudolph Reynolds, who was estranged from me by the base lies and trickery of the villain, Edward Willoughby—El Capitan! I have told you of him; and I have wished—yes, prayed—that he would come to assist me. And God did hear my prayers. He came, but he will be killed by this infamous man, who has wronged him, and made his life, as well as mine, most miserable. Save him, George! Can you not, will you not, save Rudolph? Or do you wish to see me drop dead before you?"

"I never sticks myself inter a squar' fight," said the scout; "that's whar it is, Dick. But yer needn't fret; for El Capitan are slashin' mighty wild, and Rudolph, es yer calls him, hes gut ther dead wood already on splittin' his bleed reservoy, inside o' ten shakes ov a big horn's loose end."

Before Giant George had ceased to speak, his words were verified; for Rudolph Reynolds, who had husbanded his strength, sprung upon the bandit chief unexpectedly, grasping him with his left hand by the throat, and with the quickness of thought, gave him a fatal blow. At the same instant, he hurled him from him with great violence, and El Capitan, with a terrific cry of baffled rage, fell backward upon the stone floor of the bandits' cave.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HURRAH FOR THER ANG'L O' PENARLAYNO RANGE.

At the same moment that El Capitan fell, the door of the cavern was opened, and the

sound of wild yells of alarm, mingled with rattling reports of rifles and revolvers, rung through the arched passages; while eager and anxious cries for "El Capitan" sounded amid the general tumult.

This critical moment showed that the forethought of Giant George had saved himself and his friends from instant death; for, through the door from the outer cavern, the bandits rushed in a maddened mob; but the giant scout stood behind his breastwork of rocks, and, with a deadly Colt in each hand, sent death and destruction into the confused and fear-demoralized "Panthers," who, doubly amazed and frightened at finding a hostile force within their stronghold, came to a halt; at the same instant, Giant George caught up the limp, half-dead El-Capitan, and hurled his blood-stained form over the rocky barrier into the very midst of his appalled followers.

Don Diablo, at this moment, no doubt getting scent of the fresh air and green grass of the opening at the mouth of the cave, clambered upon the rough wall, and gazed downward with his wild eyes into the crowd of terrified bandits.

Paralyzed with terror and dread by the fearful sight of their leader's body which had just been hurled among them, the "Panthers" gazed for an instant, with superstitious horror upon the strange, unearthly beast, dimly outlined by the torch in its rear; then, with yells of despair and desperation, they bounded back into the main cavern entrance, hastened in their flight by the wild laughter of the giant scout. Reaching this, they were called upon to cut their way through the ranks of the "citz" who, led by Tom Jones, the worthy sheriff from Sardine-box City, had penetrated the secret vale of the dreaded bandits.

Lena Lawrence sprung to the arms of Rudolph, as the latter hurled El Capitan from him, and clasped him in a loving embrace, as she breathed a prayer of thankfulness; but, as the bandits rushed back from the passage, the giant scout clambered over his barrier of rocks, that had proved the salvation of the trio, at the same time yelling:

"Come on, stranger! Dick must take keer of hisself for awhile. Foller me, fer ther's hefty biz out this-a-ways, you bet!"

Hastily embracing Lena, and imprinting the first kiss since their strange meeting upon her lips, Rudolph made his way over the barrier after the scout, and both were soon pouring a deadly fusilade into the rear of the "Panthers" from the pines that masked the mouth of the cave, the bandits being now in the open valley, and engaged in a desperate battle with the "citz."

In the most critical moment, during the desperate charge of the "Panthers" from out the cave into the valley, after their fright and despair at the sight of their fallen chief, when they drove the sheriff and his company before them, Don Diablo went, bounding and kicking, right and left, through their ranks, and in full view of the men in Sardine-box City. When the brave "citz" recognized the burro, they gave one wild, ringing cheer and rushed in an overwhelming onslaught upon the bandits, who,

beginning to realize that they were being shot down from the rear as well, broke and ran in the wildest confusion, and being shot each instant.

The beautiful rock-inclosed valley was soon scattered over with the dead and dying bodies of the bandits; in fact, the gang was totally "cleaned out," and the "citz" gave a round of hearty cheers as they rested on their rifles. As Giant George and the stranger who had ridden into Sardine-box City just previous to the departure of the posse, and then left with "Terrif," appeared from the cavern, the disguised Dora Deane following them, a fresh round of cheers broke upon the air. But the hearty reception was given to Giant George alone, for the "citz" did not recognize "ther Ang'l" until the latter had removed her sombrero and allowed her hair to fall below her waist; then the welkin rung louder than ever with wild hurrahs for the "Ang'l o' Penarlayno Range!"

No sooner had the giant scout delivered over Rudolph Reynolds and Lena Lawrence into the care of the "citz," than he disappeared within the cave, but soon after returned, bending beneath the weight of the chest of gold that had been secreted by Samuel Lawrence a short time previous to his being murdered by El Capitan, and which Giant George had discovered in the shaft.

This treasure he formally delivered to Tom Jones to hold in trust for Lena Lawrence until all parties should reach Sardine-box City. During the absence of the scout Lena recounted in brief the sufferings she had endured through the fiendish El Capitan, and her object in coming to Arizona and assuming a disguise. She told them, also, her relations with Rudolph Reynolds, and he, in his turn, told her, through detectives, he had learned of his friend Sam Lawrence's murder, as well as by whom it had been committed, and Lena's departure on her mission of vengeance.

The rough crowd, with Tom Jones at their head, listened in wonder, and their honest faces were filled with the sincerest sympathy. Not one of their number but was proud that he had acted his part in bringing about such a pleasant *denouement*, and great was the surprise and joy of all, and especially of Lena, when the giant scout returned with the chest of nuggets.

The posse collected their horses, and all returned to Sardine-box City, filled with the greatest relief at the thought that the dreaded El Capitan and his murderous gang of bandits could no longer cause trouble or loss to them or theirs.

The following day, the sheriff and his party returned to the cave, and conveyed the plunder, which proved to be of considerable value, to the town. It was divided equally among the "citz."

Rudolph Reynolds explained to Lena and

Giant George, that "Terrif" had guided him to the shaft that led down to the cavern, and then had departed to ascertain the position of the bandit sentinels, which it was proved that he did, conveying the intelligence to Tom Jones, and thus insuring the success of the expedition.

Hank and Mrs. Holbrook welcomed the "Ang'l" with the most extravagant expressions of joy back to the Nugget Hotel; and rejoiced with her when they were informed as to the character of Rudolph, and their past and present relations to each other, as well as in the discovery of the gold.

Rudolph insisted upon an immediate marriage, the ceremony to be performed among those who had proved themselves such faithful friends in the hour of need; and Lena's being a stranger in the land, and without any relative who might say her nay, was forced—not much against her will, however—to agree to her lover's most urgent wishes; and a clergyman having been summoned from Gold Gulch, the holy rite was solemnized in the presence of the "citz" in the open air, amid the bowlders.

Being himself quite wealthy, Rudolph insisted that each of those who had so nobly risked their lives to rescue Lena should accept a handsome present in the shape of golden eagles; Mrs. Holbrook getting, through Lena's liberality, the lion's share—a sufficiency, indeed, to enable her to "p'int back Texas-way," whenever she felt disposed to do so.

Bald Head was not only made the recipient of a small fortune, but was prevailed upon by Lena to rig himself out in a showy suit of buckskins, and return with herself and husband to St. Louis; but he only consented on condition that Don Diablo also should form one of the party.

Upon the afternoon of the day of their marriage, Rudolph and Lena visited the grave of the latter's brother in the Devil's Wash-bowl; and our heroine, then and there, resolved to remove his remains, at no distant day, to the family burial-place in St. Louis.

The next morning Sardine-box City was once again in an uproar, and all hands being met together at the Nugget Hotel to witness the departure of our friends by the Gold Gulch stage; the horses attached to the "hearse" becoming almost frantic at the yells of the "citz" as Giant George carefully lifted Don Diablo into the "hind boot," and buckled his strange pard in, allowing the head of the animal free scope, "ter'joy the scenery," as the scout expressed it.

With heartfelt good-byes, and hearty handshakes, Rudolph, Lena, and Bald Head of the Rockies set out on their long and tedious journey; the air resounding with cheers as the horses galloped up the street.

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